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THE

GOD OF THE FRAIL

BY

THOMAS G. SELBY

SECOND EDITION

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I

THE GOD OF THE FRAIL

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust."—PSALM ciii. 13, 14.

WE are often told that it was the distinctive vocation of Jesus to unfold the doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood; but we shall find ourselves faced with facts which do not fit this present-day axiom if we forget that the Spirit of Jesus commenced this work long before the days of the Incarnation. The Old Testament is now and again rich with anticipations of this priceless truth. Marvellous foreglows outran the sunrise and painted rare visions upon the sackcloth of the night. No prophet had yet ventured to assert that God was the Father of the spirits of all flesh; and yet generations of devout men had been made to feel that between the Creator and the souls quickened by His breath there were mutual attractions, which betokened a mystery soon to be disclosed. The boldest herald of the New Covenant promises had never dared to affirm that the inviolable right in the appeal of a child's helplessness was a type of the claim of the worshipper upon

the Eternal; and yet devout minds felt that the scope of His pity was beyond their power to explore or explain, and they counted upon His succour by as sure an instinct as that of a son upon the ministries of his father's home. In some vague and inarticulate fashion it was felt that the relation had many points of resemblance to the relation existing between parent and child; but till the final manifestation of love in the Incarnate Saviour had been vouchsafed it might have been presumptuous to say that it was one and the same. The severity of the Divine righteousness, however impressively taught, did not altogether exclude the idea of God's patient, tender, unstinted sympathy, and whilst holy fear was awakened the heart was at the same time solaced and softened by the prophetic message.

It is said that every star in the firmament helps to mould the orbit of other stars and, in some appreciable degree, modifies the configuration of the heavens. It is not the great despotic suns only which determine by their preponderant weight the courses and the pathways of the thick-set worlds. Our own planet is but a millionth fraction of the sun, and yet it makes its attracting power felt upon the sun just as truly as the sun makes the power of its stupendous mass felt upon the earth and the ellipse in which it moves.

How unutterably fragile and insignificant man is when brought into comparison with the Infinite Power which is the mainspring of all movement and the breath of all life! And yet man draws the Almighty God down to his help as truly as God attracts towards Himself the thought, the wonder, and the aspiration of our poor humanity; and, marvellous

to say, man draws God by reason of his very frailty. Of the sum of that human life over which He bends I am but a thousand millionth part, and yet "The Lord thinketh upon me," who "am poor and needy" —thinketh of me the more closely for that very reason. In that aggregate of conscious life scattered through the unknown fields of space, the entire human race may be as infinitesimally obscure as my tiny personality in the aggregate population of the world; and yet mean, helpless, unresisting to the portentous forces that environ me, crushed before the moth, a mere molecule trembling with a moment's joy or pain, I woo God's glance and melt His heart into sympathy and commiseration. The things that, according to every earthly rule of judgment, disqualify me for His notice have given me an inviolably sacred title to His consideration. Though upon a scale of incalculably inferior degree, I draw God as truly as God draws me; and I have a clear pledge of the all but incredible truth in the coming of the Son of Man into the world to seek and to save the lost.

Our text directly asserts that God pities us because of the pains and vicissitudes to which this fragile framework of our passing lives condemns us. It also indirectly suggests that He blends mercy with His judgment because of the limitations under which we have to pass our probation upon earth, and because also of the obstructions presented by the flesh to our best thought and service, as well as to the great destiny which is already asserting its promise within us.

I. These words remind us that *the pathos of our mortality enlists the pity of the Eternal.* Dust is the

synonym and the similitude of frailty. Whilst the mountains stand fast for generations, the dust into which they are slowly worn has no abiding place. The winds toss it, carrying its unresisting particles whithersoever they will. And the stuff out of which we are fashioned is just as unstable and never at one stay. Our lives are of slenderer fibre than unspun silk, brittle as threads of fine-drawn glass, breath-breakable as the texture that only holds together in a vacuum. The Psalmist goes on to speak of death, reminding us that man is like a flower of the field which, untended by human care, unscreened by human device, unwarmed by human art, shrivels at the first sign of change and the first moan of desert wind, and dies neglected and forlorn. That, of course, is not the main subject of the Psalm, and is brought in only as an impressive illustration of man's disability, helplessness, stinted resource. Through the entire round of his days he is ever showing himself the weak matching and measuring puny capacities against the strong. Death which draws the curtain over his cold, inert, baffled clay is but the last phase in that ever-recurring spectacle of impotence.

God's survey takes in the final picture of our weakness and all the scenes of pain and humiliation which lead up to the last, sad, tear-bathed page of our earthly history. He sees us in the end withered, broken-winged, helpless for a time in the clutch of death. From our cradle upwards there are forecasts of mortality cleaving to us that He is ever watching. How tender earthly fatherhood would become if it could detect at once the weak strains in the bodily organisation of the child and all the circumstances

under which the flaw in health would show itself; if it could foresee in the case of each member of a family the final scene of all! Will the faces of the children pale and wrinkle after the lapse of years? Will their lithe forms become constricted with pain? Is it true they can only be refined in those furnaces of terror, from which we in our strength shrink? If we could see in a magic mirror the chequered careers of our children, as the prophet forecast the havoc to be wrought by the sword of Hazael, we should be disabled from common duties, and the tears would scarcely ever dry from our faces. Well, is there not a pathos like that softening God's view of us? Is not His scrutiny mollified by the remembrance of everything we may have to endure? The All-Strong, who is at one and the same time the All-Pitying, can bear the stress of that tender, tremendous forecast. The Divine sympathy which stretches out towards us is proportionately intensified by the remembrance of our frailty.

The late General Gordon, in one of his published letters, describes the remorse he long felt for a trivial act of cruelty into which he inadvertently fell. A lizard was climbing up the side of his house in the sunshine and he thoughtlessly flicked it with his cane and so cut short its life. He had often shed blood upon the battlefield without the slightest hesitation, and felt never a qualm of conscience afterwards. But this act troubled him more than the carnage in which he had taken his part as a soldier. He was haunted by the feeling that he had destroyed a life that was more meagre in capacity than his own, and much shorter in its span. In the regret, to which he confessed, there was a genuine ethical discernment, for

every virtuous nature feels itself under special obligation to the weak. God thinks mercifully of us because, in comparison with His own rich, manifold, exhaustless and immortal blessedness, our lives are chequered, circumscribed, crippled, and poverty-stricken. We are mortal, blooms trembling to their fall, fading dreams, fabrics of exposed nerve, phantasms of alternating smiles and tears. We do not expiate our sins by that which we suffer, and God has no indulgent laxity for wilful, unwept, reiterated transgression ; but our frailties woo the marvellous compassions of His Fatherhood. Perhaps if He had not made us out of the dust we could not have stood so near the sacred centre of His pitying love.

In his essay on "The Sublime and Beautiful," Burke points out the fact that we always associate physical smallness with the idea of beauty, and he supports his rule by reminding us that in every known language terms of endearment are diminutives. Is not the reason for this common note in the taste and speech of mankind that the hearts of the strong and the chivalrous are captivated by the very weakness which solicits defence? When we are called upon to play the part of providence to the helpless we experience a mysterious satisfaction which influences our esthetic judgment, and the helpless grow beautiful in our eyes. And does not this peculiarity in human nature give us the clue to a mystery in the heart of God? When He made man He put Divine qualities into a slender framework, filled up with delicate clay, because to such beings the deepest secret of His tenderness could be spoken.

It was not without a show of reason that some of the religions of the East spoke of matter as diabolic

in its origins. The critic of the providential order of the world is ready to say, "If the Almighty had only decreed to lead us forth into conscious immortality by some other pathway, less rough and thorny, He might have spared Himself the need of an extravagant pity and have excused us this lot of privation and intolerable pain. To clothe life pregnant with great aptitudes, such as ours, in a framework of wincing flesh, was surely one of the inscrutable blemishes of the creative plan." But have we not to think of the gains that come to us through this nervous, oft-suffering delicacy of the life, as well as of the drawbacks? It is well to be insphered in vulnerable nerve if God's pity is effectually engaged by our helplessness and passing distress. Pity is imprisoned in realms where the shadows of weakness and mortality cannot fall. Towards one who is strong, self-sufficient, of invincible hardihood, it is impossible to cherish those tenderer emotions, which are a part of the perfect altruism. There are Spartans upon earth whose eyes are never wet with tears, who have never been known to sigh, who repel sentiment, and who die at last like imperturbable Chinamen. They decline sympathy, and never make the least call upon our kindness and goodwill. We may be near neighbours, but they do not draw us. Their very strength has made them paupers and splendid outcasts, and they go through life lacking the common birthright and inheritance of human love. Fortune has cursed them with the sunshine of its perpetual smile. If we could have wept with them in some sorrow or rendered them some trifling service they would have been much better liked. The sorrows and vicissitudes of strong kings knit them more closely to the hearts of their subjects

than the most patriotic public acts. That principle is the clue to many enigmas in God's dealings with the children of men. But for the infirmities of the flesh we might never taste the sweetest springs of God's tenderness. It is well to be in this poor, mean, oft-racked flesh if He become Incarnate by our side; well to be tempted if He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities; well to be in affliction if He is the sick visitor who comes through the door; well to die if He is at hand and His presence gives us fortitude. The flesh has its drawbacks, but it has its compensating benefits likewise, for in its infirmities we reach to an experience of the Divine helpfulness, which perhaps the strong angels, cradled in realms of pure mind, vainly desire. Let us be thankful that we are not made of steel, or we might never have got close to the kindest heart in the Universe. It is well that Science is limiting the range of pain, but, when it has done its best, there will always be a residue of sharpness in the human lot, sufficient to evoke a Father's compassion for His dust-made children.

One of Robert Louis Stevenson's letters puts the human side of this problem into a nutshell. Writing from San Francisco to Sidney Colvin, that man of tender spirit says: "My landlord and landlady's four-year-old child is dying in the house, and oh what he has suffered! It has really affected my health. Oh! never, never any family for me! I am cured of that. Excuse this scratch, for the child weighs on me, dear Colvin. I did all I could to help, but all seems little to the point of crime, when one of these poor innocents lies in such misery." Robert Louis Stevenson was discoursing as an outsider, a lodger in the house. Perhaps the verdict of the father and mother would

have been otherwise, yea, even that of the poor little sufferer himself, if he could have been brought into council. Children in their most terrible agonies cling, by an instinct which is wise and just, to the love which irradiates their earthly lives, and only when they find the struggle hopeless are at last content to depart. The satisfactions of love exceed the power of pain, great love is preferred to little love, even when the condition of it is a tragic tribulation. And weakness and pain are elements in our spiritual evolution of which we shall one day think lightly, if they have only put us into a surer and more complete possession of that Divine sympathy of which the finest forms and expressions of human sympathy are but inadequate types. It is not without a far-reaching reason that God has fashioned us of a weak, sensitive, perishable material. It is the children of the dust who are destined to know at last the deepest secret of His heart.

II. These words imply that this brief life man spends in the flesh enlists the Divine compassions, because *great spiritual issues turn upon a right use of its opportunities.* The issues of a stern probation intertwine themselves with the textures of our earthly lives. The allusion to the history of Israel in the wilderness, which begins with the sixth verse of the Psalm, still colours the writer's thought. Man's life is not only brief, but great tasks are laid upon him, which he must complete within the allotted years. This sense of the moral significance of the deeds done in the body is not confined to Jewish writers and the exegesis is not overstrained, which finds some such interpretation of life in the words before us. An ancient philosopher, who belonged to the

least spiritual and speculative schools of thought, speaks of perfect virtue as the burden to be carried along the lifelong path and death as the goal at which the burden was to be laid down. The writer of this Psalm makes us share his persuasion that a magnanimous judgment will be passed upon the results of a probation passed under these brief and fragile conditions.

The handbreadth of time within which man has to put forth his latent spiritual greatness is short in comparison with the epochs that have been used in perfecting forms of life inferior to his own. The ages taken to evolve a flower, to build a reef of coral, to decorate an insect and fit it for its part in the economy of nature, are vast by the side of these carefully counted days accorded to God's children for the overthrow of sin and the building up of a devout and believing character. The time set apart for man's moral education is presumably a point, a moment, the sough of a passing breeze in comparison with the eons through which angels have been learning the lessons which inform and inspire their work and service. The perishable flesh imposes its restrictions upon our great life-task. We are sometimes ready to say, "Give me Gabriel's span of years and I will achieve something. No kind of perfection can be achieved in threescore years and ten. It is fatuous to expect from brief-lived creatures, kneaded of dust, rare and bountiful fruitions of character." But, in spite of such repinings, our life upon earth, short though it may be, is long enough for the submission of the will to God's rule, for the conquest of inbred lawlessness, for the birth-dawn of loyalty to the supreme truth and righteousness; if not,

perhaps, for the repair of every shortcoming and the achievement of every excellence presented to our hope. There is a strength, a noonday lustre, a moral elaboration, a wealth of accumulated wisdom quite unattainable in the threescore years and ten at our command. But the time-limit is not the only thing that is adverse to our higher struggle. Life is not merely short, but a small fraction of time can be given up to the spiritual exercises which equip us for the great things demanded by our coming destiny, as the Bible interprets it. The flesh with its complex needs is greedy of our days and nights. Well, is it not a part of God's plan that the meditations by which our highest nature is fed should alternate with protracted periods of secular occupation and struggle? For a few golden hours we inhale God's breath and eat angels' food, and then through a round of sordid, servile duties we have to assimilate the mystic virtues which have been brought within our range. We are dealt with by short object-lessons presented to our experience at wisely determined intervals. For sustained and untempered spiritual realities we are not yet sufficiently strong. The fleshly ingredients of which we are partly constituted tend to narrow opportunity more penuriously even than the scant term of life itself. But even if it be so, God does not expect from us the complex perfection He looks for in beings less clogged and time-bound than ourselves. And this limitation He compensates by a grand liberality of help. Do not imagine the disparity between your fugitive lot with its petty opportunities and the boundless life of Him with whom a thousand years are as one day stands for a chilling and a bridgeless inequality. It is

rather the scale by which we must reckon His sympathy.

Let us beware of speaking as though a life of probation, hemmed in by the flesh, were one of the blunders of God's government and had no offsets of advantage. As the sculptor puts his thought into soft clay which can be taken from or added to till after many touches and corrections limb and feature grow harmonious, and then transfers the thought to marble which is unsuited for free manipulation ; so God puts us into the flesh till the promise of an ideal character appears within us, and then, when fatal defects have been eliminated, translates us into nobler and more magnificent material. The error and blemish of our pupilage might have been irreparable unless we had first lived in the flesh and learned through the disciplines of which it is the subject. The sensitive textures which enswathe our life may help us to a quick knowledge and admission of our mistakes. Errors do not all at once become gigantic in their scale and irremediable in their fatality. We are so made at the beginning that we possess the suppleness and the recuperative power of little children. Perhaps the sins of purely spiritual beings are so much akin to sins against light that they admit of no forgiveness. God can make our infirmities the ground of His compassion and occasions of reasonable forgiveness through His Son. Whilst never glossing over wilful transgressions He brings the weaknesses of the flesh into His pitiful reckoning.

This probation is not only limited in its appointed term, but *hampered by the desires engendered within the bodily framework.* Some of our temptations are

indigenous to the substance of which we are made ; and the Psalmist's words may suggest that the Lord looks with indulgent tenderness upon those who are prone to passion and to physical appetite. We are compounded of inflammable and explosive ingredients and are easily moved to anger, lust, and hunger for all that can satiate the senses. It is in the flesh and blood that animal instincts take their rise, and we must not lightly assume that sanctity implies exemption from those impulses which are common to all organic life. To represent holiness as though it involved the immediate death of all passion, is both false and pernicious. Saintliness is not determined by the absence of bodily inclinations, but is proportioned rather to the number of inclinations which are kept under control. The man without a passion is a physiological anomaly, whilst the man sensible of its strange restless stirrings may be one of the excellent of the earth. The devil himself does not have to carry the burden of the flesh and all that it contains and involves. Some of the biggest miscreants of history have had temperaments by no means overpoweringly gross, temperaments which seemed to invite them to better things ; whilst many of God's holy ones were made at the beginning of coarse clay, and never found themselves quite free from those inbrooding impulses of which organic life is more or less prolific. It is the control of our desires and not their complete elimination which determines character. A man is not indicted for an incendiary or a dynamitard because he has vestas, paraffin, wood-shavings, and guncotton under his roof, but may have to answer for it if these things are out of their proper places, and cunningly grouped for

mischief, in any or every part of the building. We have normal appetites that should make us watchful, jealous over ourselves, circumspect; but they need not bring self-accusation and despair of God's favour. They are in the scheme of our being and God's judgment of us takes scrupulous note of the fact. He thinks none the worse of us for our struggles, if so be that the will ranges itself on the right side, and we never allow ourselves in shameful surprise and defeat. Our characters must be fortified to hold in these passions, just as the retort has to be built to contain the molten steel poured into it. It sometimes seems as though forces of volcanic strength had been put into a vessel of Satsuma ware, and it were scarcely possible for mortal man to stand the strain. But God knows the stuff of which we are made, and He is able to save our weakness from final failure.

How tender God has ever been with our infirmities, and what timely relief He has ministered when the tension in our burdened and tempted lives had well-nigh brought us to break-down and disaster! An obelisk, originally brought from Egypt, stands in the piazza of St. Peter's at Rome, which was put into its present position in the sixteenth century. It weighs little short of a million pounds, and required the strength of eight hundred men, one hundred and fifty horses, and forty-six cranes, to lift it on to its pedestal. The crowds who witnessed the feat were forbidden to speak under pain of death. As the ropes were tugged by hosts of workmen, and the huge obelisk slowly reared itself like a waking giant, the movement suddenly stopped and the ropes threatened to give way. The huge mass was about to fall crashing upon the pavement. An old sailor

in the crowd, familiar with the humours of ropes and the methods of treating them, broke the silence and cried, "Pour water on the ropes." The advice was quickly followed, the ropes tightened, and the obelisk slowly rose again and settled securely upon its base.

In our past life how often have strain, tension, and peril come to us! The ties by which we were knit to goodness, to truth, to purity, to faith, were sorely tested, and seemed ready to snap and plunge us into ruin. Some temptation arose out of all proportion to the staying power of our trust in God, some shock fraught with impending disaster to the character, some partial alienation from right paths threatening to strand our lives in uselessness. But the eye of infinite wisdom was watching, and God remembered the weakness of the flesh. From within the unseen there came a voice that saved us, and the peril was overpast. The strain eased off, character strengthened itself to the emergency, and we were kept in the plane of our providential lot. And through this wise, watchful pity of our infirmities we come to find ourselves with a place in the living temple, monuments of the gentleness, the sympathy, and the upholding power of the God who pities the frail. In the moments which most show our weakness the Lord remembers that we are but dust, and fortifies us against the strains and hazards which belong to our earthly course.

We are made of particles, inflammable as the dust which sometimes chokes the coal-mine, causing disastrous explosions. We breathe an atmosphere of peril. It permeates the basis of our life and all our surroundings, and if unwatched may break out into greed, envy, wrath, wantonness. But just as the

frequent sprinkling of water in the dust-choked mine allays the peril, so if the clean water of the prophetic promise is sprinkled upon us and our ways, if the appointed means are used to subdue the riotous elements which belong to flesh and blood, and the Master's warnings are kept in mind, we shall neither bring ourselves into condemnation nor jeopardise the spiritual interests of others. Do not let the mere presence of natural instincts dismay the soul and estrange from God as though that of itself were sin. Because God pities us He has placed at hand for our use adequate counteractives to the mischievous forces of passion. He takes account of the impulses that will always be in us till, in his own time, the natural is exchanged for the spiritual body.

There is an unduly indulgent temper abroad in the world which would make sin a symptom of physical derangement, and release men from all serious responsibility for self-control. On the other hand, too little account is taken by rigorous strict-living Christians of the constitutional factors which now and again disturb the even consistency of the spirit and of the life. In godly families cases of aberration sometimes occur, the causes of which are pathological rather than moral. A mother will now and again distress herself to the point of torment because a suffering child, whom angels were just waiting to carry into the land of light, was peevish, fretful, angry in its last hours upon earth. Saints whose characters have been maturing for half a century, in the closing hours of their history seem like spiritual degenerates. The havoc disease has made in a delicate brain is forgotten, and the canons of the spiritual life are fallaciously applied to interpret mental alienation

and collapse. The bloom seems to have passed from the piety, and the light about the death-scene is weird rather than mellow. But in his merciful judgment God penetrates through what is apparent and avoids our pitiable confusions between moral and physical causes.

These words seem to imply that we are the objects of pity because *the flesh puts a drag upon our holiest aspiration and service.* The frictions of these gross, dust-made bodies retard and restrain our best enterprises so that we cannot effect all that we would. We are frail, slow-moving mortals, who have been set to Divine tasks, and we often need to pause because of the infirmities which beset us. Like the weeds which hamper the free movement of the keel through the deep, the flesh ever seems to be clogging our progress and keeping us back from the goal of our dreams. The Saviour Himself felt these resistances inherent in the earthly clay, and although His career was an unbroken triumph of the spirit over the flesh, it was a triumph through continual struggle. If we are to share in any humble degree His triumph, we must needs deny ourselves daily and take up the cross which repels. Flesh and spirit are never quite at one, and find it all but impossible to keep in step with each other. Like ill-matched travellers over a thorn-grown continent, the one is hale, strong, fit for the forced marches that would soon complete the task; whilst the other, worn with fever, crawls pitifully on ulcerated feet from stage to stage, often pleading for rest. But they cannot part, and through all the bitter experiences yet in store for them must stand side by side. Ostrich and tortoise, eagle and worm, ox and pawing war-horse are under the same stern

invisible yoke, and are tortured by the sense of incompatibility. The flesh rather than the spirit seems to determine the scope of our attainment. There is an irksome back-set to every movement, a fretting reluctance, an exasperating check, when the soul is panting for winged ministries. Well, God knows all about it, and does not expect from the like of us the feats of throne-spirits. All this enters into His reckoning and draws down His pity. Jesus Himself must have been heart-stabbed by the gross slumber of His disciples at the hour of His supreme pain, and yet He casts over their failure the mantle of a nobler charity than the world had known. "The spirit is willing and the flesh is weak." And in speaking He reflects the grace and gentleness of His Father. The Lord never forgets that we are dust-made.

In visiting a children's hospital you do not look for the feats of a well-appointed gymnasium. The sight of little children moving on crutches or with limbs in splints, strapped to beds or in plaster-of-Paris jackets to correct deformities, calls forth a different set of feelings from those awakened by the athletics of robust schoolboys. This weak and pain-smitten world is God's "guild of poor things," and He does not expect in these scenes of weakness and distress the valour and the exploits of the angels, who excel in strength. The Divine Father remembers that we are compassed with frailty and hemmed in by disqualifications. Whilst waywardness must be corrected and moral deformity in all its aspects must be removed, He has taught us that infirmity is distinguished from sin, and, through the mission of one who was tempted like unto His brethren, has assured us of His exhaustless compassions.

The flesh obscures the vision of spiritual things, and these words imply that the Father of lights looks graciously upon those who are peering through the imprisoning gloom of the senses in the hope that they will yet see His face. The fine dust of volcanic eruptions and of sand-storms sometimes finds its way into the chronometers and scientific instruments of travellers and navigators, choking their movements and deranging the calculations for which they are used. And the dust out of which we are made, and in the eddies of which we have to pass our lives, insinuates itself into the highest faculties of the soul, disorganising the reason, the conscience and the imagination, and incapacitating us for correct spiritual discernment. Our outlook towards God is circumscribed by bodily limitations, and in attempting to grasp the infinite we are made to feel that it is beyond us. We try to form an intelligent conception of God and are baffled. We think of His power, His wisdom, His spirituality, His eternal being, and we are troubled because we seem to get little beyond the idolater and the agnostic. These senses shut in our vision. Primitive man learned to think in pictures, and we cannot escape the hereditary habit. It seems as though God must surely frown upon our halting worship. The substance of which we are compounded keeps us gross, unspiritual, earthy. But that is a condition determined mainly by our life in the flesh and for which we may justly plead more or less of irresponsibility. Perhaps we have as correct a view of God as Adam, for in the first stage of his mental development he could only think of God as a form; and in gracious condescension to human infirmity God took upon Himself a form and came to

walk and talk with him in the cool twilight of the whispering garden.

The filial piety of a child does not consist in his mastery of all the obscure chemistries and psychologies epitomised in the bodily form towards which his eye turns, but in love, responsiveness, prompt submission. The father expects these things, and, under ordinary circumstances, little beyond. And God does not make it our duty to know Him by the processes of pure reason. The methods of speculative and technical theology, though not without their value for many minds, are of little account in His sight as our Father. Whilst we are in these bodies and compelled to think through the analogies with which they furnish us, it is impossible for us to have any just conception of what He is. He looks to us for love, for heedfulness, for conformity to the example of His Incarnate Son.

Let us not condemn ourselves as though it were an easy or even a possible thing to focus into pictures the parts of God's ways we see and to visualise the broken gleams which make up our conception of God. We are sometimes tempted to impeach the sincerity of our own religious profession because earth with its interests is more palpable than heaven, and in our habitual scheme of thought Time is a highly illuminated foreground and Eternity a fluctuating distance-line, filled in now and again with guesses. True seekers after God often shrink from a religious profession till they can see with the prophet's eye and assure themselves that the mountain is alive with the fiery chariots. Before taking up the cross of discipleship they want to attain the vividness of the beatific vision, which is an inversion of the appointed order.

We are not required to disrate and condemn ourselves because of disabilities arising out of those crude fleshly conditions in which the soul-life first begins to germinate. How often does the flesh prove too weak for the vehemence of a superb intellectual life, and spiritual vision surely cannot make a less trying demand upon it. Some one has said that all genius is closely related to insanity, for it implies an extreme excitement of certain portions of the brain which upsets the balance of the rest. And sustained, far-seeing spiritual insight may be just as fatal to nervous equability. The flesh is frail and the overwhelming pressure of religious interests often brings dislocation and break-down. Spiritual contemplation has its sacrifices and its immolations, and God may sometimes rank religious mania as martyrdom. The flesh cannot hold the intensest forces which wait to possess the spiritual life, and God knows. To many besides Jesus the word may apply, in an inferior degree, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." The splendour in which God dwells is filtered of its overpowering brightness by the dulness of the flesh, and we may strain our spiritual senses in vain to see it as it is. God ordained this when He made man of the dust of the ground, and for our constitutional limitations has ready an apologetic, tender, magnanimous final—"He remembereth that we are dust."

II

THE PRIMAL CONSCIOUSNESS

"He that planteth the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not He correct? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not He know?"—PSALM xciv. 9, 10.

THIS Psalm was written in a crisis of national distress, when men of alien faith held the sceptre of power and gloated in oppression and bloodshed. Not content with practising violence towards the chosen people, they spoke contemptuously of the God with whom the victims of their misrule professed to be in covenant. Their idolatry had passed into Atheism, the malignant type of Atheism that had its roots in a perverted character; and they scoffed at the God of Jacob as though He were the stupid and futile invention of the Hebrew brain.

These verses assert that in due time God will act, for He cannot be otherwise than a God of knowledge, deep in whose heart counsels of inviolable righteousness lie hidden. He is always cognisant of what goes on in the world, and especially heedful of the cries and supplications of His own people. These acts of oppression, done to the fatherless and the widow, do

not elude His notice. Drop by drop He counts the innocent blood that falls upon the green world He has made, and bends His ear to each sigh of the down-trodden. There is a spiritual property in every sense with which the human body is informed, and that property has its immeasurable counterpart in the nature of the Godhead. Just as knowledge flows in upon us through eye and ear, touch and taste, so by countless tracks and channels, hidden from our view like the mesh of ever-speaking wires beneath the pavement on which we walk, the events which make up the life-history of mankind convey themselves to the infinite consciousness. As within the soul of man, motives are always evolving themselves which impel to every kind of action, so God possesses a rich, unresting moral life from the fulness of which He teaches, instructs, and disciplines, not only His own people, but the Gentiles likewise. He hears the hoarse blasphemies against His honour—blasphemies which imply that He is helpless as a maimed chieftain to defend His followers, or, worse still, that He has forsaken them in the day of their calamity. He will soon take it upon Himself to answer such profane reproaches. In swift and sharp judgments He will come to hand-grips with this bristling iniquity, or He is strangely changed and the page of history gives false testimony concerning Him. He cannot be less than His own creatures whom He has endowed with the hearing ear, the seeing eye, and the imperishable sense of right and wrong.

These words imply that if man possesses the attributes of personality, man's Maker must also possess them in an enhanced degree. Hence arises the sure confidence that a Divine judgment draws

nigh which will banish the wrongs under which the faithful groan. It has ever been so in the past. Righteous acts that are not the outcome of a living and a righteous personality are inconceivable. The power that makes for righteousness must see and hear and know, and then set itself to unflinching judgment.

The Psalmist asserts that whatever natural or moral faculty exists in man must have its grand original prototype in the being of God Himself. He argues this from the *senses with which the Creator has endowed man*, and also from *the trend of God's providential acts in human history*. The argument has stood the test of centuries, and we hear it with instinctive approval in the present day, that every effect issues from a cause, and the cause must have in it qualities which will adequately account for the effect. The manifold gifts of intelligence imply not only an invisible Giver, but a fund of pre-existing qualities within the mind of the Giver drawn upon for the endowment of the race. Sagacity, moral consciousness, the power of self-determination cannot begin to operate in man unless there be a fountain-head of such qualities in God, from which they are conveyed. There must be a kindled and uprising sun to make the dayspring, and the effect is inconceivably less than the cause.

If the explorer of an unknown river finds grains of gold in the sand, and sees the rude tribes inhabiting the banks wearing rings and anklets fashioned from the shining particles, he knows that the gold has not been produced by the spontaneous chemistry of the rushing waters, nor have the fishes leaping there discovered that secret of transmutation after which men vainly groped for centuries. Away in the far-off

hinterland there must be gold-bearing reefs through which the river washes, or rocks of wonderful richness near its head-springs. If gold glitters in the bed of the river as it nears it ocean goal, lands of Ophir must surely lie at its sources. And if there be knowledge in us great treasuries of knowledge must surely belong to Him from whom our lives flow. We cannot bestow upon others that which we do not ourselves possess. If there be living discernment in the creature there must be living discernment of keener quality and vaster range in the Creator.

The Pantheist speaks of God attaining the consciousness of His own Being in the common consciousness of the race. Such a mode of speech dismisses the doctrine of a First Cause, and makes the infinite the child of the finite. The changes introduced by science may compel us to drop some of our old similitudes and to recast the form of the doctrine, but the essential truth of the doctrine will never be obsolete. Primordial cells, no matter what the amazing conditions under which they are placed, can no more evolve spiritual issues that have not been grafted into them than the camel thorn, by the devices of soil, temperature, training used in scientific gardening, can be made to burst into Marshal Neil roses. Pastoral symphonies are not composed in the dark, solitary cell where the hateful silence is only broken by the still more hateful footstep of the warder or the clang of the iron gate; nor are Turner landscapes painted in the gloom of African forests, where the colour sense is imperfectly developed; nor are Hamlets and Macbeths written by rude Indians who notch the trees of the forest to record the years they have lived upon the earth. For

music there must be an atmosphere vibrant with minstrelsy, for art the esthetic environment of the picture gallery and the studio, and for literature Cadmus, Cædmon, Chaucer, and the long line of tuneful harpists and scribes. Our living, intelligent, multiform consciousness is an emanation from the primal Divine Consciousness. Our hearing, seeing, moral discernment, reflect higher processes which operate with unknown intensity in the mind of God. Everything in our nature but sin, which is parasitic, must have its more perfect counterpart in God, and our personality is the offspring of His.

Science in that which is made implies parity of scientific knowledge in the maker. The capability of an instrument will give some kind of clue to the capability of the brain that planned it. Till some few months back there stood upon the city wall at Pekin a remarkable set of astronomical instruments mounted on bronze dragons. The craft of the workmanship is superb and purely Chinese. But the plan and the adjustment of the instruments represent a knowledge beyond that of a people who assume that eclipses are caused by the attempts of fabulous monsters to swallow the sun and moon. The instruments are not so modern as those in our own Observatories, and yet Copernicus and Galileo had lived when those instruments were made. Up to the present hour China has had neither the one nor the other to guide it. The knowledge of accomplished Jesuit missionaries was put into the making of those instruments, and the amateur Chinese astronomer, working in an Observatory equipped by the science of Europe, can see and calculate, because Schaal and Verbiest could see and calculate before him. The

mind that created the instruments knew at least as much as the mind that centuries afterwards learned to use them. And so with the gift of those senses which are the avenues of knowledge. The attributes of our personality take us back to those transcendent attributes from which our own are derived. The fact that I see is a proof my Maker sees. The fact that I hear shows that He hears also. The fact that moral discernments are called into play within me by the exigencies of my social life proves that He draws a line between right and wrong in providential history deeper than the gulfs which separate worlds.

The Psalmist affirms that the distinction between right and wrong which God imprints upon the nations through the providences of history has its primal type in the mind of God Himself. The age-long discipline of the generations is the sign of an intense moral life in the Great King of the earth which vitalises that discipline. Many of us habitually disregard the conscience and yet at the same time feel that it is the truest and most trustworthy of all the faculties with which our beings have been equipped. We practically treat it as a charlatan, and in our more reflective moods reverence it as a prophet. Why is it that conscience is not hustled aside as a discredited impostor? Because by the chastisements and admonitions of His reign over the nations God has been ever confirming and emphasising all the intimations of which it is the mouthpiece. It is His unseen and active sovereignty which makes men's views of right and wrong converge whilst their civilisations tend to diverge and differentiate. And if some supreme personality behind the visible universe takes such countless pains to falsify our passions and to accredit

our consciences, is not that a proof of the significant fulness of God's own moral life?

The argument is just the same whether we look upon conscience as the immediate effect of the Divine breath within us, or as the last refined product of a long-continued evolution; perhaps upon the latter theory the argument is stronger. It implies that through untold ages God has been acting for the purpose of awakening and building up a conscience in man, and that an indomitable motive has sustained and kept him from weariness.

A naturalist must have an uncommon faith in his own patience and longevity if he asserts that he will breed from a pair of vultures a race of birds in which the predatory impulse shall have been exterminated, and which may be trained to prefer a clover-field to a field of carrion. That man must possess persevering grace in abounding measure who proposes to teach a pair of tiger cubs, or cubs that may spring from them, to do the work for which the Paris police are enlisting St. Bernard dogs,—rescuing drowning persons from the Seine. You would call a man a crank who vowed that he would engrave the decalogue upon a slab of Aberdeen granite by the use of a soft camel's-hair brush, instead of by hammer and chisel. It might perhaps be done in half an eternity of patient effort, but not even in the lifetime of an old patriarch. And yet the task would not be greater than God's work of bringing a St. Francis out of a Caliban, and a St. Teresa out of a cannibal Amazon by centuries of reproof, correction, and alluring love. The hypothesis is that an unseen pressure so operated upon the infrahuman orders of life that at last there was a response and a faint sense of moral distinctions

dawned within the tribal consciousness. Other long epochs swept by and in virtue of this unabating pressure exercised in both direct and indirect ways, good and evil became as clearly and permanently separable from each other in the mind of primitive man as day and night. Yet other millenniums were added to the term of man's discipline and training, and at last the passions yielded their submission to this sovereign moral faculty which, under the processes of providential training and discipline, had been slowly evolving itself within the soul. If it be true that God has been carrying forward without faltering these processes of which the common race-conscience is the result, does not that suggest to us a life of moral intensity in God that baffles us to imagine and describe? "He that teacheth man knowledge shall not He know?"

Such writers as Haeckel and Büchner refuse to postulate a personal God and deny also the doctrine of human freedom. I have tried to grasp their attempts to explain how an ethical function can arise from a pure sensation. They imagine all sorts of mystical conditions under which matter acts, described for the most part in terms which assume an unknown kinship between electricity and life. The old names are ruthlessly banished, but the facts of consciousness have still to be reckoned with both in their effects and their causes. Whirling swarms of electro-zoons get together in different parts of the universe and set to work to attain through their interaction all the potencies of both Divine and human attributes. Amongst superstitious races the names of certain common objects are "taboo," because they have unlucky similarities of sound to things that are

disliked or are terrifying, but the objects exist unchanged and are simply called by other names. The believer in evolution without God is often a mere tabooist who goes on dealing with the same essential facts of consciousness, whilst he abuses us for using the names by which we have been accustomed to connote them. The sense of personality is indestructible whatever we call it, and the genesis of personality can only come from personality. The ultimate effect of dismissing the spiritual with all its ideas and phrases would be to materialise God into the more rarefied and mystical forms and forces with which the student of physics deals.

We need to indoctrinate ourselves with the argument of the Psalmist for there is a tendency to depersonalise God, sometimes on grounds directly opposite to those which influence the advocates of a materialistic philosophy. Many thinkers assume that the special attributes of personality inhere in the body rather than in the spirit, and that we make God less than infinite by adopting these anthropomorphic modes of speech. They find it hard to harmonise the ideas of thought, will, emotion which operate through the brain and nervous system of pigmy man, with the immensity which exceeds the universe itself. But the financier or statesman who sits in his office and by the use of cable and telephone makes his wishes prevail in half a dozen capitals is not less a person through that marvellous, mechanical extension of his personality than the Kaffir who crouches in his hut and is a nonentity in the next valley. Personality is not so localised as to be necessarily finite. It is well to know just what we mean by the

term. The forces of a human personality centre themselves in a body a few cubits in stature, and one or two hundred pounds, more or less, in weight. But you cannot submit its subtle elements to the scale or the foot-rule. That human personality should have a body of three dimensions as the centre from which its mystic influences are distributed is a mere accident and has no more to do with the true inwardness of the fact than the bricks and mortar of an electric generating station have to do with the area over which power is conveyed. Intelligence, affection, memory, consciousness, self-determination—these are the essential attributes of personality and are conceivable apart from the tiny structures of nerves through which they pulsate.

It has been said that God is neither personal nor impersonal, but suprapersonal. That is the metaphysician's new altar to "the unknown God." By the use of this novel compound language is stultified and a thick veil of obscurity drawn over the Divine revelation which has been vouchsafed to us. God is like thought, but above thought, and yet not quite the same as thought; like love, but above love, as a subjective experience, and yet not altogether the same as love; like consciousness of which He is the cause, and yet above consciousness, but at the same time no stranger in His own life to something akin to consciousness; like will, and yet above the need for willing, and after all not entirely void of those acts of choice which are the mainsprings of moral energy in human life. In these metaphysical superlatives we flatter ourselves that we are climbing high, but our pilgrimage lands us in mists of impenetrable denseness. A God who is described by negatives,

diluted by qualification heaped upon qualification, and rarefied into incomprehensible refinements, makes the head dizzy and the heart cold. When in speaking of God we use the pronoun, must it be the neuter or the personal? Shall we say It or He? for worlds turn upon the distinction. We classify whatever comes within the range of our knowledge into either "things" or "persons." To which of the two categories does God belong? for we have not yet thought out a third in which He can be placed. The personal is the highest form of existence we know, and we pay scant honour to God when we decline to think of Him under this aspect. If we identify God with things, with the far-ranging forces of which suns are but as specks of froth on the eternal tides, with the immeasurable universe itself, we are reactionaries and are simply enlarging the scale of the primitive fetichisms. There is only a difference of degree between the rude idolatry which worships finite things and the latest philosophy which worships more or less specifically the complex sum of things. The object of the one cult is singular and of the other plural. We put God under our feet, or at least make Him on the same level with ourselves, unless we recognise that the highest attributes we possess He also possesses in inconceivable degree, and that He is a personal God who can come into personal relations with His creatures. It is true our knowledge of God is approximate, but if we negative our approximations by saying that God is neither personal nor impersonal we make the conception absolutely powerless, futile as a random guess. The lowliest and most limited creature into whom the qualities of personality have come is greater than galaxies of impersonal suns.

The late Matthew Arnold seemed to look upon the doctrine of the Divine personality as an excrescence upon the Christian religion which might be skilfully removed without fatal results, and as in no sense the root of its power. When he proposed to substitute for the Divine name his own famous phrase, "A power not ourselves which makes for righteousness," he flattered himself that he had invented a metaphysical eirenicon, upon the basis of which virtuous agnostics might associate themselves with the Christian Church. Perhaps we do him an injustice if we assume that the phrase represents the maximum of his own personal belief. In one of his last books he says:—

"The spirit and tongue of Israel kept a propriety, a reserve, a sense of the inadequacy of language in conveying man's ideas of God which contrast strongly with the license of affirmation in our Western theology. 'The high and holy one that inhabiteth eternity whose name is holy,' is far more proper and felicitous language than 'the moral and intelligent Ruler of the Universe,' just because it far less attempts to be precise, but keeps the language of poetry and does not essay the language of science. . . . How little we know of it besides, how impenetrable is the course of its ways with us, how we are baffled in our attempts to name and describe it, how, when we personify it, and call it the moral and intelligent Governor of the Universe, we presently find it not to be a person as man conceives of persons, nor moral as man conceives of moral, nor intelligent as man conceives of intelligent, nor a Governor as man conceives of governors—all this which scientific theology loses sight of, Israel, who had but poetry

and eloquence and no system, and who did not mind contradicting himself, knew."

Perhaps Matthew Arnold appreciated his Bible as literature better than most men, but his sense of its message was inadequate if we are to judge by this quotation. The personality of God is just what the Jew did believe in with all his mind and soul and strength, and that belief has put upon the Bible indelible features which are an offence to some of the abstract thinkers of the present day. The doctrine of the Divine personality is as vital to religion as the doctrine of human personality, either formulated or implied, is necessary to society. We could not converse, enter into each other's lives, love and abhor, if divested of the faculties which constitute personality. There would be as little sympathetic relation between us as between the heedless particles in a sandstorm. We are gathered into families, communities, Churches, nations, in virtue of inborn mental and moral capacities which constitute us living persons. Upon the basis of "a power which makes for righteousness," you may have a religion which enforces righteousness by a ruthless code, but not a religion which wins by the allurement of a high example; and all hope of fellowship with the Divine is foreclosed. A power cannot make for inward righteousness without a person behind it. It is the personal qualities in God which make men susceptible to the moulding operations of His providences. We instinctively resent the use of instruments of torture, as we do not resent the chastisements of the living hand, because the pain inflicted by soulless, impersonal instruments is wanton and barren. A teacher might as well argue that a lens turned upon the school

would maintain order quite as well as the living eye, and the salesmen of a patent incubator avow that it would be no less efficacious than the light and warmth of a mother's love in stimulating character, as an irresponsible reformer of the creeds tells us that "a power" can tell as savingly upon human character as "a person." It is the personal only which can influence the personal.

The man who has become honestly and intelligently possessed with the truth that God is a person, will find every subsequent article of the Christian creed comparatively easy of acceptance. We cannot go far wrong in our theology if we hold that God is a person, and he who thinks the world can do without theology is a trifler whose folly is beyond ordinary expletives. Not a little obscurity has its beginnings in looseness upon this cardinal subject. Admit that God is a free, conscious, intelligent, self-determining person, and, if you have the logical outlook, it will soon be evident that you have committed yourself to the sum and substance of the Christian faith. Why have so many men come to look upon the doctrine of the Trinity as an unmeaning hypothesis, a pedantic mystification of the schools, a half-contradictory crochet of the Church Councils? Because at the root of their thoughts they have had no proper sense of the personality of the Divine Being, and have so failed to realise that within the Divine Nature itself, there is an insistent and eternal need for love, which has made the Godhead from the beginning a mystery of ordered relationship and reciprocation. Why with all our talk about the loving Fatherhood on high, have we come to think of God as embodying the arctic rigidity of Nature

rather than as boundless, catholic lovingkindness and fidelity? and why have we insidiously slipped into the feeling that prayer is a worthless figment of belated piety? If we had been clearly and steadily holding to the conviction that God is a person, we should never have been carried thus far on the way to irreligion. Why have we come to regard the sacrifice and mediation of Jesus Christ as an irrelevancy in the order of human development, and whilst holding to the ethic of Jesus, have let go much of our faith in His work? Because we have drifted into the assumption that God has not an intense, vivid, personal life, and that His hatred of sin is less ominous than our own—that God, in fact, is dreamy, abstract, impersonal goodness. Why is it that we have so come to minimise and attenuate the wrath which pursues sin that a dread of Divine displeasure has passed out of the heart of one-half of the nation, slack trade being feared more than abounding iniquity, and the irreligion of children being classed as a minor family misfortune? We could never have got into such habits of thought if we had cherished an adequate impression of the fact that God is more vividly and intensely personal in his inner life than we are. Personality does not belong to the fleeting and the phenomenal. That which hears, sees, and thinks, that which loves surpassingly and also loathes, is eternal. All the Christian creeds are wrapped up in this doctrine of the Divine personality.

Our various senses have been imparted so that we may come into conscious communication with each other, and live in a society that is established upon righteous judgments. It is by the knowledge conveyed through these channels that we grow up into

the perfection of our being. And it is through His own faultless and continued seeing and hearing that the Divine Giver of these human senses keeps in converse with all that which He has made for Himself and maintains His own eternal perfection. The unsleeping watch we keep upon each other, and the more or less audible verdicts we pronounce, should remind us that the universe has in it an all-hearing ear, an all-seeing eye, and an all-judging wisdom. God is not shut off from converse with the outer world as the inhabitants of a besieged city are practically deaf and blind to the events of contemporary history. We cannot help passing judgment upon the moral qualities of the actions which come under our ken, for an inbred instinct impels us. All speech and all literature is an attempt to do that and to defend the verdict we give, to engage our love for some things and to direct our displeasure against other things. We are born judges, and when we cannot wear the ermine we resign ourselves to the position of jurymen. And this unconquerable habit of judgment is the movement of a finite faculty whose infinite archetype is nearer to us than we realise. Everything is heard, seen, counted, appraised in God's perpetual judgment of us. We shall never live truly, reverently, justly, till we remember the ear God planted and the eye God formed, are symbols of an ear which catches every whisper, and of an eye which penetrates to the last locked ward and secret stronghold of our thought. These Divine faculties, of which our own senses are pledges, observe and discern not only for judgment but for help and succour likewise. It is ten thousand times more likely that the wrong which frets into torture will be recorded and avenged by

God than by man. The probabilities that God, in His own way and time, will hear our prayer, are far higher than the probabilities that the cry in which one man addresses his fellow-man will win its suit. He who gave to men of every speech and every kindred their ten thousand times ten thousand organs of sense, has an inconceivable capacity for seeing and hearing, and the aggregate perceptions of all human faculties combined, when compared with God's knowledge of us, are but like the trembling refraction in a dewdrop in presence of a colony of incandescent suns.

The decline of prayer, whatever the particular reason assigned for it, is in the final analysis a decline of faith in the personality of God. We must hold to the Psalmist's argument if we are to mean anything by the bended knee. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." God thinks, God loves, God judges, doing upon an incalculable scale the things we do in a tiny world of microscopic measurements and reductions; and inasmuch as there is no conscious reciprocity between a breathing man and a group of impersonal atoms, so God's personality, His personal mind-movements, and His personal actions, become the basis of a communion that would otherwise be unthinkable and absurd.

III

THE INFINITE FORGIVENESS

"As far as the east is from the west so far hath He removed our transgressions from us."—PSALM ciii. 12.

THE writer of this Psalm groups his thoughts under three clearly defined heads. He speaks in the opening verses of personal forgiveness and the blessings which cluster round it. He next dwells upon the forgiveness which God has extended to His people in their Covenant life, as illustrated in past history and the present outlook. And he fittingly closes his meditations with a tribute of praise to the power and sovereign dominion of the God whose mercy reaches to all generations. Our text belongs to the second division, and in terms of inspired rhapsody extols God's pardoning compassions to the race He had called into His Covenant.

The average Jew acquired his sense of the Divine forgiveness by remembering that he was an organic part of a redeemed community. God had pitied and pardoned, in significant ways, the race to which he and his forefathers belonged; and whilst affirming from time to time by the prescribed forms his Covenant birthright, he was under little or no temptation to

regard himself as an outcast. It was comparatively easy through these traditional methods to exercise a vague faith more or less profitable for consolation. If God had no special, discriminating care for the individual, He could at least care for the community of which he was a member. The humble, meditative man, knowing his own sin more entirely than he knew his neighbours', found it easy to think that the nation would be saved, and that he would reach salvation in company with it. Perhaps he often thought of the virtues of the saints and of the ministries of the priests as a common stock of benefit in which he and his neighbours would jointly participate without distinction. That God forgave the nation was the stepping-stone by which he reached the persuasion that God had forgiven himself.

The hope of salvation which some men in modern days entertain because of their affiliation to the Church is a part of the same idea, and is doubtless a survival from Jewish times. God deals with men in racial and confederated aggregates, and is it not well to be identified with an accredited body to which His mercy is pledged? But another idea was emphasised in the ministry of Jesus Christ. His message was a message of condemnation to the body politic but of absolution to the separate penitent. He taught that the Divine Father dealt with the individual, that responsibility was first personal and afterwards corporate, and that men must be saved apart, before they are gathered into elect communities. He never remitted the sin of men and women in groups but in units. This method was sometimes anticipated under the Old Dispensation, for when men had transgressed in heinous ways, like David, they could not be satisfied

by remembering their relation to a Covenant people, but needed a specific and personal assurance of God's forgiving love, sometimes announced by a prophet inspired for the express mission. There were, moreover, times of apostasy in the life of the nation when the promise of forgiveness had to be asseverated in striking ways. But the end of the old and the new methods alike was to create a forgiven community out of forgiven individuals, for it was only through the praises of a community that God could be exalted.

It is the prerogative of a personal God to forgive, and where the Divine personality is either denied or relegated to an obscure background, no place can be found for this cardinal doctrine of the evangelical creed. The proposed article of the new creed I believe in a "power not ourselves which makes for righteousness," can never by any scheme of legitimate logic lead up to the confession, "I believe in the forgiveness of sin," although it may leave room for automatic judgments. The throb of a pitiful heart of love is behind this act of sovereign grace, and the removal of the sense of guilt by the removal of sin is intended to bring the recipient into living union with the Most High. Forgiveness is the taking away of a stumbling-block which obstructs our friendship with God. We can conceive of Nature letting us off when we have transgressed her order, although as a matter of fact she rarely if ever does so, but we cannot conceive of Nature in the act of forgiving us, not only because it is beyond her prerogative, but beyond her capacity as she is known to us through the sciences which interpret her laws. There is no deep, discriminating, personal tenderness out of which such an act could

arise, and with our present conceptions we cannot think of ourselves as repaying her clemency by gratitude and love. A piece of machinery may give you a chance of disengaging yourself from the whirling wheels, but you have no sense of its pitifulness when you have made good your escape. It is a happy contingency rather than love which impresses your imagination. In fact the revolving iron is immitigably cruel and is the type of inexorability.

From abstract power, the huge sum of things, the inscrutable force behind all life, it is vain to expect a forgiveness that will sweeten the bitterness of the soul. If our conception of the universe and the Supreme Power ruling it be such that we can find no place in our scheme of thought for the Divine forgiveness we must needs return to first things and revise our conception of God. Assuming that a Supreme Being cannot forgive us and make Himself the Lover of the helpless human race, the Universe itself is a towering Bastille of adamant, immuring never-dying souls in blank despair. Sin can only be dealt with by the grace of a personal God, and its solid and immutable shadows will lie like a perpetual madness across the soul-life for want of a strong and tender hand to put away this curse. In fact the doctrine of forgiveness first dawned upon human thought in its true splendour when God came into covenant with the children of men and made His Son the minister of that Covenant. "The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sin." It is "through this Man that there is preached unto us the forgiveness of sin"; and "this Man" is the essence, the image, the counterpart of a personal God.

No parable of the prodigal son is possible in religions which leave the personality of God in doubt. Students of Buddhist literature profess to have found there some variant of the immortal story, but if the Father is left out whose eye can be radiant with pity and whose lips can shape themselves to kiss the unworthy, the parable itself is a shell from which the life has perished. You might as well expect lilies and orchids to grow on the slag-heaps of the Black Country, and birds of paradise to soar out of the belching fires of blast furnaces, as expect such pictures to people the brain of a man who thinks of God as stupendous and inscrutable force rather than as a Being warm with personal life and sensibility. Where God is thought of as either less or more than a Person and the idea of unchanging law monopolises the horizon, retribution will seem appallingly protracted and pardon a hopeless dream. As diseases sometimes leave indelible scars so the result of sin may persist through ages. Buddhism in its neo-European and its Asiatic forms alike yields no foothold to the sympathy and soul-absolving compassions of heaven. Some evil chance in my life to-day, hints the Buddhist, may have its starting-point in an incarnation through which I passed five thousand years ago, and the pains inherent in the transgression must be endured in many lives.

It is said that the Welsh mountains were once higher than the Alps, and that they have been slowly worn down to mere stumps by the erosion and rain-drops of untold centuries. And according to some systems of Oriental religion patronised in London, Paris, and Berlin, sin in its mountain accretions must be removed grain by grain and atom by atom, through

the process of self-culture, and merit-making continued along the tear-wet pathway of countless transmigrations. Moral sequences are appalling in their indomitable power, and if these theories are to be trusted no strong and pitiful hand can hurl our sin in the twinkling of an eye beyond the confines of habitable space. The tragedy is not to be dealt with by the cataclysmic beneficence of a vicarious redemption. Law is inexorable and there must be eons of pain, privation, and disability. But the cold, stolid Chinaman, with a capacity for enduring affliction more prodigious even than his aptitude for industry, the ideal Stoic of the Far East, could not bear this idea of unrelaxing pain. Did not the universe at times look too gay for his theory, and was he not himself a creature of family instincts? So for once in many centuries he allowed himself the luxury of an original idea and invented a Goddess of Mercy who mediates in this universe of impersonal potencies and, at given intervals of time, lets fall cooling lotos-leaves upon the writhing sufferers of the underworld.

Now this idea of penalty which must pursue its course to the bitter and inevitable end exaggerates only one side of a fact, for it has crept into Hebrew thought, and the writer of one of the Psalms speaks of God forgiving the sins of His people whilst He at the same time took vengeance upon their follies. The two laws interact, and the people who are forgiven are at the same time chastised, but not in a wrath which brings them to nothing. It has been said that there is a sense in which sin is for ever punished in the saved as well as in the lost, for a man can never entirely recover slighted opportunities, and the Divine Love itself is unable to deliver him all at once from the

dwarfishness he has brought into his own character. That perhaps forgets the fact that grace much more abounds than sin. We are debtors, as hopelessly in bondage to pain as the Hindoo peasant who has mortgaged himself and his unborn posterity to the pitiless moneylender, and who is pulled down by every fresh famine that settles upon his home. And yet we are dealing with a Father and not with a heaven in which sits an Isaac Gordon, and a vast healing sunrise floods the round of our shadowed life. Mercy and judgment find the law of their benign combination in the Cross.

The Psalmist's rhapsody is in no sense exaggerated, and the disabilities of our sin do not follow us a day longer than we need their lessons. God's mercy brings a sweet oblivion of the shame and selfishness of misspent years. In the check put upon our natural and spiritual strength by the errors of the past, in the shrunken opportunities of which our half-maimed lives are made up, in the less splendid honours that beckon us forward, there may be plain marks of a disability entailed by early unfaithfulness and transgression; and yet God in His love has come so near to us that His immeasurable Being is interposed between our souls and past sin. Our consciousness has found a new centre in God, and the bygone is like an evil dream that vanishes in a dawn rich in help and lovingkindness. The physiologist tells us that the human embryo is furnished with gills and bears marks of an amphibious ancestry, that a new-born babe in its marvellous powers of clutch shows kinship with arboreal forefathers, and that a little puck-like projection on the upper curve of the adult ear is a vestige of the time when the

human ear was erect and had to turn every way to catch the sounds of jungle and forest. But if we have had such an ancestry we have happily forgotten the hole of the pit whence we were digged. The voice of the physiologist is one thing, and the voice of the living consciousness another. Our senses have left for generations the slime of the creek and the dripping gloom and dim tangle of the forest and the haunts of the wolf, and are occupied with art, poetry, music, and the manifold amenities of modern civilisation. And so whatever tokens of our early degradation and evil God may see about us, whatever sign of the wild-beast past a pitiless scrutiny may detect in our inferior life, we have moved forward into a realm of forgiveness, the kindly presence of the Great Absolver besets us behind and before, and our lives should be a constant echo of a pardon that we have received and sweetly assimilated for the benediction of others. Forgiveness is written on everything around us, and through the infinite mercy of God our sins have sunk below the horizon line, never to come back again. It is declared by the blood of peace which replaces the accusing blood of Abel. In fact, we have received the complete mark of God's forgiveness, a vocation from above. When a criminal has fulfilled his sentence society does not always pardon him, and for lack of employment he slips back into the abyss. But God shows how completely He forgives the man to whom He extends His grace by giving him something to do and raising the outcast into a minister of His will. To hands washed from every kind of foulness He gives tasks the angels who guard the gates of pearl might well covet.

But the Psalmist implies in his magnificent metaphor that human transgression is dealt with by an act of superhuman grace and power. "As far as the east is from the west." It is perhaps difficult to say what dimensions the Psalmist had in view when he used these terms. His geographical knowledge may have been limited by the purple wall of Moab or the Syrian deserts on the one hand and the silver edge of the Mediterranean on the other. We must not read into his poetry the story of the heavens as told by the modern astronomer. But the terms were of unknown range and unlimited elasticity. These figures of the firmament meant for him just as much as they mean for us with our larger knowledge. All the dimensions of space are used to illustrate this hymn of the Divine mercy through every line of which there murmurs the exhilarating breath of a spiritual springtide. No term can be put to the compassions of Almighty God. A little book of popular science attempts to prove in one of its chapters that space is finite. If by space is meant the realm filled with stars and star-dust through which attraction travels, possibly that may be true. But however far our thought may range through the immensities we can always conceive of a beyond. And the last realm which imagination can conjure up is a realm from which the vastness of God's mercy stretches to our earth. The utmost diameter, not only of the star-sown domain but of the universe of ideas, is the measuring line by which we must compute the grace that has put away our transgressions. It will not be God's fault at least if the sun ever shines on them again.

The ancients conceived that the firmament was

a vast seething chaos out of which good- and ill-fortune alighted, and that influences emanated from the movements of the stars not only to render some lives illustrious but to plague, blight, and curse other lives ;—a bit of ancient superstition which now and again finds a belated advocate in the centres of modern knowledge and civilisation. But this sacred poet recognised that, for the man who feared God, mercy stretched from the loftiest point of heaven to the gloomiest abyss of human weakness and distress. For a good man every malign influence of the air, real or fancied, is disarmed by the sovereign love working there. No prince of the power of the air can condemn whom God has justified. "As the heavens are high above the earth so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him."

The slow march of the constellations to their unknown goal will never light up the far-off gulfs into which God has put the transgressions of His forgiven people. If there is a beyond to the uttermost confines of space God has cast our guilty burden there. Let us keep within His Covenant and the new suns that may shine upon us in this life and that which is to come will never shine upon fear-smitten fugitives from wrath and condemnation. The firmament that overarches us will be filled from end to end with the sense of sweet reconciliations. To the nation and the individual alike God in His rich and incommensurable pity is ever giving a new acquittal, and by putting away the shame and the guilt of the past bringing fresh hopes to the birth. Between ourselves and our sins we try to put a soul-soothing interval of time, and miserably fail ; for in our silent and museful hours the sins of the

past wake up like fever-sick children in the night. The reproach for a half-forgotten transgression begins to ache without a moment's warning. When we assume that our sins are as good as forgiven because they have faded from the memory we practise a trick upon ourselves. But God seeks to interpose between us and our bygone follies and offences illimitable space and to bury them beyond the setting of the last sun. Sin unexpectedly comes back when it is buried by a human hand. Some years ago a curious detection of fraud was brought before our law courts. A will had been written in pencil and duly signed by the testator. The pencilled lines were afterwards wiped out with indiarubber and an entirely different bequest substituted in ink. When the will was produced the pencilled portion had reappeared. The effect of removing pencil-marks with rubber is to curl up the fibre of the paper, and in the course of time the fibre uncurls and the pencilling reappears. And is it not thus when we deal with sin by sophistries of our own? It is sure to come back unless it is put away by an act of Divine power. The Divine hand not only blots out sin, but consigns it to an oblivion from which it cannot be brought back. Divine mercy must deal with it, and Divine mercy alone. And then wherever the soul on its unknown pilgrimage may come it will find itself in realms of pardon.

Although the Psalmist speaks in such bold and uncompromising terms of God's forgiveness, we must not assume that there is any strain of indifference to moral distinctions in the magnanimous act he celebrates. To pardon implies a vast constraint of pity, an indescribable sacrifice the cost of which men

only began to learn centuries later, and the immensity of which is still a mystery to us. To remove our sins beyond the bounds of the world was a greater thing than to create the world.

We are to prone to judge God by the analogies of our own littleness. We find it comparatively easy to forgive those who are beneath us, for they have little power to hurt and we are not acutely sensitive to their opinions; we live in another world, and can make ourselves proof against their acts. But the facility with which we forgive offences that cannot touch us to the quick is not benignity of character, but the isolation of selfishness. With the meanest parts of the universe God is more closely identified than we are with those in whose veins the same blood courses and whose affection is most necessary to us. It is easy for us to forgive a trespass that does not touch a close personal interest or the vital welfare of those for whom we care. It is easy enough for us to forgive a man who, at the antipodes, has swindled people whose names are unfamiliar to us. It may often involve less of a struggle to forgive a wrong against ourselves than a wrong against frail women and children whom it is our natural duty to shield. God is the representative and kinsman of every aggrieved being under the sun, and a Divine chivalry enlists His zeal against all injustice, impurity, and oppression. It is easier for us to forgive an alien or a servant who has been guilty of a flagitious act than an unworthy child. If a policeman has occasion to come into your shop or warehouse and arrest an employé you feel humiliated, but if the policeman had to come and make an arrest within your family the shame would be a hundredfold greater. We

speak of the instinctive delight of the Father in forgiveness, and whilst there is truth in our words, it is not the whole truth. If a crime had been committed in your neighbourhood and it was at last found out that your child had taken part in it, you would feel a much greater access of indignation than if the guilt attached to a gipsy, a tramp, or a foreign seaman. You would not feel yourself compromised to the same extent by the act of an alien. There is a solidarity between God and man not existing perhaps between God and the angels, and man's sin is more heart-breaking in His sight than the spiritual anarchy of those who kept not their first estate.

And in due time there came the Atonement to teach men at what an immense cost God forgives sin. The cross is God's appalling protest against sin, and till we link our forgiveness with the holy unblemished sacrifice of the love which suffered there, we shall never begin to know the true meaning of this gracious act. One reason why men are so careless upon the subject is that forgiveness has been preached without identifying it with the Cross, and forgiveness has been thought of as though it implied God's attitude of lofty indifference to the moral qualities of human action. God forgives sin unreservedly, but in the fulness of time men were brought to connect forgiveness with the propitiatory work accomplished for the race by the only begotten Son of the Father. In forgiving sin God declares that it is an infinitely momentous act by linking it with the death of His Son.

The Koran denies that God has sons—a denial possibly intended as a protest against materialistic

views of God and intended to extol His sovereignty. "They say 'The God of mercy hath begotten offspring.' Now have ye done a monstrous thing. . . . Verily there is none in the heavens and in the earth but shall approach God as a servant." This austere protest is fatal to the doctrine of forgiveness through mediation and vicarious sacrifice. If God does not stand to any beings in the universe in a relation corresponding to the relation between an earthly father and his children, it is not likely that He will so feel their sin as to identify Himself with the processes of its expiation; and if every being in heaven and earth must approach God as a servant, there is no scope for the work of the daysman. The Divine Fatherhood implies an unparalleled horror of sin and an unexampled grace in the historical processes by which it is both condemned and put away.

Is this great fact announced by the Psalmist a personal experience with us? We can never be right in God's sense of the word till we are forgiven and have an individual sense of it. In the new heavens and the new earth sin is banished by God's free compassions, and we belong to an order which is old and doomed till that is brought to pass. "Their sin will I remember against them no more." What a stupendous transaction! what a sublime paradox for God to forget! A Chinese inquirer once said, in reply to a question about his experience, that he felt as though God had cancelled sixty or seventy per cent. of his sin. The misconception might be excused in that case, for he was only just coming into the light. If atonement is a question of self-discipline, of course it must be a little at a time. But God

never does things by halves, meting out His pardons in petty instalments. No niggling methods dishonour the kingdom of grace. He absolves magnificently if He absolves at all. "I will abundantly pardon."

IV

FORGIVENESS MINGLED WITH JUDGMENT

"Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance on their doings."—PSALM xcix. 8.

THIS Psalm, which celebrates the sovereignty of the Divine holiness, is divided into three parts, each part ending with the refrain, "For the Lord our God is holy." The text occurs in the third section, which casts a brief backward glance upon the early history of Israel. God surrounds Himself with saints, and it is holy men who have access to His presence and find a due response to their prayers. "Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel amongst them that call upon His name." And then, without any intimation of the transition, the thought seems to glide from these distinguished saints to the refractory peoples for whom they made intercession. Indeed the absence of any note of transition is perhaps meant to imply that not only did God blend forgiveness with judgment in His dealings with the rebellious Israelites, but in His treatment of these godly leaders also whose names stand high on the roll of fame, and who sometimes erred in common with the people and had to share their chastise-

ments. The intercessors themselves, Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, were scourged for their shortcomings, although freely and unstintingly forgiven. Good men often reflect in themselves the defects and share the chequered experiences of the race to which they belong. When God hears prayer, pardons transgression, and puts honour upon His promise, at some time or other, be it sooner or later, He asserts His holiness by the tempered punishment of sin and so vindicates the truth of His threatening. These words describe the experience of the individual as well as the religious history of a race.

Mercy and judgment must be harmonised. A magnanimous pardon worthy of God's Fatherhood and a scrupulous honour for law worthy of the Judge of all worlds, must meet together in God's providential government. The child absolved by the law may be sternly corrected in the household for the offence upon which the court has refused to pronounce its uttermost condemnation. We sometimes assume that forgiveness and judgment exclude each other, and that the climax of clemency is to release from pain rather than to produce sympathy with righteousness. When the preacher appeals to the fears of the impenitent, casual hearers of the word run away with the idea that the end of religion is to get scot-free from the penalties of the past and that faith is the patent key which lets us out of the condemned cell. But that is unscriptural and untrue. The forgiven suffer, sometimes even beyond the average lot of their fellows.

Many reasons can be assigned for this intimate association between judgment and forgiveness.

God joins pardon with impressive correction *to*

guard us against mean utilitarian views of grace and to train us into a true appreciation of the inwardness of His saving work. In the beginning of a soul's return to God it is often moved by selfish, superficial fear. The unhappy effects that follow after sin stir up loathing, trepidation, mental distress, outward amendment and prayer. But these initial motives are intended to be temporary and transitional only, and that man has not tasted the deepest secret of forgiveness who looks upon the grace as mere security against the portentous suffering in which the Divine wrath manifests itself. The highest worth of our reconciliation consists in this—that it opens to us anew all the tenderness of God's heart, makes us heritors of its rich affections and the chosen confidants of its counsels, whilst exemption from judicial pain is one of the secondary and least vital elements in our forgiveness. Men are apt to fasten on the adventitious aspects of God's economies of mercy, and when they do so spiritual growth is all but impossible. The multitude would be just as eager to be saved as to become rich if the gain were utilitarian only, and would be just as little improved by their eagerness. Now these judicial reminders of past obliquities, these disciplinary harshnesses that recur again and again in the course of our lives, prevent that misguided issue. They indicate to us that the greatness of salvation consists in something else than defence against the stings, strokes, and disabilities of a blundering and rebellious past. Salvation is not a cheap charm that fortifies a man against the consequences provoked by his miserable misdoings. He is driven to take hold of that which is the very core and marrow of reconciling grace.

That he is restored to his lost place in the love of his Covenant King he finds the grandest element of his salvation, and in his selfishness he had once thought it the least. He can come nigh to God again and find that God is near to his own soul, and this is better than being made pain-proof. Jesus did not die to introduce anesthetics into a sinning and a suffering universe. When we know that the Divine forgiveness is already granted and that our brief discipline is benign in motive we can bear that God should reckon with us somewhat sternly for the past. God's method saves us from a religion of puling, thin-skinned effeminacy and selfishness. It teaches us to prize that Divine favour which is the essence of forgiveness immeasurably more than release from the pain incident to past transgression.

Our surviving imperfections require that the forgiveness of the past shall be associated with a rigid judgment of its lapses. The fact that we look upon our oft-repeated delinquencies as trivial in their import shows that we need an admonitory discipline of sternness as well as a generous and compassionate absolution. Again and again are we tempted to a presumption which would pervert the grace of God. And the more closely God takes us to His favour and friendship the more urgent is the necessity for the providential lesson. The very forgiveness of God, whilst intended to be the chief motive and mainspring of a new life, may betray men into carelessness. We assume too jauntily that, having been forgiven, our perfecting in habits of life will follow in due time and there is not much more for us to trouble about, inasmuch as the crucial question has been put right. What is the grace possessed by a forgiven man worth

unless his shortcomings are all but innocuous? They are surely benign rather than malignant forms of disease, and so we go about as carelessly as the man who has been rendered immune by science against plague or snake-bite. Such is the treacherous whisper which may sometimes be heard in the heart of even the sincere believer. It was an easy thing to secure forgiveness, and we have learned the great secret. The tension of fear is past and whatever things may yet need to be rectified in speech, disposition, habit of thought and act are of trivial and subordinate significance. Now God has to teach us the heinousness of many of the base things we are too ready to condone in ourselves, and He can only do so by reckoning with us sternly for the past. However merciful and plenteous in forgiveness He may be, if the offences of yesterday have to come into the account, surely the offences of to-day with its accumulating privilege and opportunity will be judged and sharply chastised. The man who escapes the rod altogether is inclined to relax his effort at self-conquest and to drift into the ease and dreaminess of unreal security. God's judgment of the past makes us watch to-day and guard to-morrow. It spurs us to jealous scrutiny of all the unfathomable issues of the heart. God is ever saying to us as He reckons with us for the past, "No transgression is little. Take heed lest much tribulation should await you. Put away the surviving sin, for my judgment will not overlook it."

One of China's famous sages said the ancients were so afraid of impairing the good feeling between parent and child that they did not venture to teach their children at home. The necessary birchings

might have impaired the sentiment of filial piety. Neighbours exchanged sons, and it was in this way that the profession of the schoolmaster arose. That is a quaint suggestion, and if true to fact would show that the ancient Chinese had little faith in the permanence of that sacred instinct upon which they have built their religion. Well, God has no need to hand us over for chastisement to some foreign lictor. The prodigal back again in his home would manifest under correction and rebuke a meekness of which the elder brother was incapable. The views God unfolds to us of His forgiving love will prevent our hearts from growing hard and rebellious when we are smitten for our own profit. The generosity of His forgiveness is so large, the reconciling grace He bestows upon us so exquisitely tender that we can bear His stroke without murmuring. Perhaps it is the very fact that forgiveness has been certified to the conscience which makes God venture to punish us so sharply; otherwise the spirit might fail before Him. The sense of His favour protects against bitterness, exasperation, ingratitude, unfilial passion in the hour of our pain. We have been comforted, and there is no seething rebellion now. God dare not punish an unregenerate soul in this world as sharply as He afflicts some who are near to Himself, for it might turn a stranger to His grace into a premature devil. His keenest discipline is set over against His tenderest forgiveness. In fact, measured judgment is mingled with immeasurable mercy and the strokes of His hand become tokens and pledges of a great salvation. "For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" We may sometimes need to drink the cup of wormwood, but it is not the cup of

the wine of the wrath of God, and the lips that taste the wormwood taste also the cup of salvation and know its sweetness the better by contrast.

Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, David, were men whom God wonderfully assured of His compassionate friendship, and yet they suffered sorely for their faults, suffered to the very end, and through these sufferings were made perfect in the flesh and enabled to escape the retributions of the life to come.

This union of judgment and mercy in the Divine dealings with us is designed to show that *the law of retributive righteousness never ceases to operate in our lives.* It is immanent as God Himself, for the law is the form assumed by His personal activity. Our deceitful hearts tempt us to imagine that the government which frees us from condemnation must be weak, shifty, vacillating in its foundation principles. In the dawning hours of our release from fear moods arise when we incline to think that grace is some clever surreptitious process to disburden us from our bonds and obligations, and following upon that we fall into an unconfessed and inarticulate antinomianism. We are in a glorious Alsatia at last, and can do much as we like. The gospel is a dealer-out of indulgences, a duly commissioned Tetzel with a Divine mandate behind it, an angel of emancipation who visits us, but who has no special instruction to emancipate us from ourselves. And perhaps this danger is greater under the Christian Dispensation, where so large a place is given to the doctrine of forgiveness, than under the Jewish Dispensation. Now God's ever-recurring judgments, which in the sphere of the temporal reckon even with outblotted sin, are intended to secure His grace against any

compromise of its sanctity and any libel upon its spotless name. When we look to the Cross we see there One who has put Himself in our place and borne in our stead those pains which are bitterest and most enduring, but the Cross does not extricate us from the disciplinary operations of God's eternal law. It brings us into sympathy with that law, so that with meekness, fortitude, and eternal hope we may bear the personal disabilities that the just God has put upon us. If the saints of olden times had need to suffer for their misdoings and limitations, we are under the same need, and the more so as we have a fuller sense of God's sin-remitting compassions. Those who receive most richly from the Cross must have their training for immortality in a school of retribution. Forgiveness does not put us beyond the law and make us kings who can do no wrong. It would be a snare and a curse to us if it did. The law of retribution is near at all times as God Himself, and is meant to keep us from falling. The fairest and the sweetest flowers are protected against insect attacks by thorns and stings and bitter secretions. And God puts the thorn of His sharp judgments about our forgiveness, some stinging fragment of the crown worn by the Man of Sorrows in the glory of our salvation, some faint reminiscence of His cup and His baptism into the cup overflowing with mercy so that our high benediction may be kept undiminished and undestroyed.

This association of judgment and mercy *makes the public declaration of Divine forgiveness possible.* The weak-minded and vacillating Pilate, when confronted with the alternative of punishing the innocent or displeasing the mad mob of accusers, suggested a

compromise. "I will therefore chastise Him and release Him." That was an infamous proposal in dealing with the innocent, but may be just and equitable when the guilty, of whose recovery there is hope, stands before the bar. Escape must not be too easy for the man who is liable to fall away and repeat his offences. As private citizens even we can hold no relation with the man who seeks to shirk the just pain and penalty of his transgression. We might be suspected of condoning delinquencies, and when those delinquencies are felonious, to do so might carry with it serious consequences. We often want to extend succour to the man who has committed a trespass, but can only do so upon condition that he will submit to a severe reprimand. If our clemency be wanting in righteousness we shall be looked upon as abettors of the offender. Many a philanthropist is willing to help the criminal, but not whilst he is a fugitive from justice. He must first submit himself to the sentence, although every step will be taken to ameliorate its rigour. If sin-offering could exempt from penalty under either the Old or the New Dispensation other sufferers under the Divine wrath might have just cause of complaint against the equities of God's rule. That wonderful and mysterious allegory in the first chapter of the Book of Job seems to imply that the universe may have in it many critics and censors of the Divine government who have a claim to be regarded. The Divine government must be such as will commend itself to every dissident and contentious soul in God's creation. Complete exemption from penalty upon the basis of a vicarious sacrifice, and conditioned by a penitence the visible fruits of which cannot appear at once,

might put a premium upon ungodliness, allure into the nominal circle of the elect the meanest and least penitent spirits of the race, and confirm society in its unholy riot against God. Forgiveness must cure sin, and in order that it may more surely do so it is often linked with a stern judicial reckoning for the past.

These chastisements are intended to *illuminate the character of God*, and to give an assuring insight into the dispositions of those upon whom they fall. This Psalm celebrates the Divine holiness, and one of the most significant illustrations of that holiness is that the famous saints who penetrated furthest into the sanctuary of God's glory were nevertheless rigidly reckoned with for the residuary imperfection in their lives. Although infinite love associates itself with infinite holiness, that holiness is exacting to the last degree. It is no light thing to come short of Divine glory. Not only does the Divine government compel a judicial reckoning with the lapses of God's people, but something in the Divine character likewise insists upon it. He who experiences no inward quickening cannot be absolved from condemnation, and to that inward quickening temporal chastisements are contributary. But when such chastisements are meekly and submissively borne God is justified in the large measure of mercy He exercises. "I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against Him," said one of the prophets. True forgiveness must not only cancel a hopeless debt, but subdue us into such unmurmuring meekness as will serve to show that the pride has been dispersed from our hearts and a complete reconciliation to the Divine will accomplished. When God's pardoned people

bow without a complaint beneath His rod that glorifies God's method before a querulous world. Divine holiness is vindicated. The more sharply God chastises, the freer He is to bless and to crown when the affliction is patiently endured. This exacting discipline is the very condition under which His mercy makes good a title to large dominion, for it both emphasises the holiness of God and brings into view the change which is passing over the dispositions of those with whom God deals by a rule of blended judgment and mercy.

This method of pacifying the heart with His forgiving love whilst He continues to vex the flesh with severity and to disappoint its dreams is meant to divert our thought and interest into spiritual channels. It is in the sphere of the unseen that the great merciful amelioration begins. Old Testament believers looked for the signs of God's favour in temporal things. They saw it reflected in the fields, hovering amidst blithesome flocks and herds, symbolised in the health, well-being, and growing power of children. But the New Testament teaches that these are often the spheres within which those brought back to God and dealt with in forgiving mercy are humbled and made alive to God's unerring righteousness, so filling up that which is behind of the suffering of Christ. St. Paul speaks of delivering certain transgressors to the evil one that "the spirit might be saved in the day of Jesus Christ," and St. Peter tells us that "for this cause was the gospel preached unto the dead that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." Forgiveness brings sure and blessed exemption from wrath in the sphere of our

spiritual, but not at once in the sphere of our natural relations. Conversion is meant to turn men to spiritual holiness, and we must welcome the most ungenial disciplines that refine and uplift the highest part of the life. In a greater or a less degree, forgiven men suffer for the rest of their days, more especially if the process of sanctification from sin is comparatively slow. Bad passions corrode the subtle textures of the nervous life like a violent acid. The man who is irritable, vain, and ill-tempered is not only an affliction to his friends, but to himself likewise. Buddhist pictures of Purgatory represent some wicked men as cast upon beds of spikes and thorns. A vain man carries a burden of unwasting torture with him all his days, and every time he lies down to rest puts stabs into his own quivering flesh. For every fault you must suffer. Your forgiveness is real, but do not presume upon it. Look for its signs in the spirit rather than in the flesh. God has some unknown penance to which you will have to bow, and death is the last stroke of the rod, after which there come silence and rest. There is no chastisement for the believer beyond this life, but there is chastisement here up to the last breath, and we cannot become unselfish and spiritual without its spur. It completes the worth of our forgiveness. Oh, what folly to settle down to the faults and frailties which have become so habitual to us! By every wrong act and wanton temper we prepare for ourselves some cup of bitterness, some ordeal of pain, some enduring humiliation.

Do not let the Divine judgments that mingle themselves with the goodness and mercy of your life depress or hinder faith. These visitations of sternness do not

exclude forgiveness, and ought rather to encourage and strengthen you, for lavish and undeserved compassions never fail to attend the sharpest trials. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews teaches that the stroke which falls upon the trembling flesh is not a message of malignity. However many the troubles that seem to whelm with their cumulative terrors God is not exacting His pound of flesh. The unrebuked boy in the school is one of whom his master despairs. On the surface of some lives the calm is ominous. "They are not in trouble as other men." Scrutinise yourself closely and you will find some germ of offence, some unhealthy reaction from the unregenerate past, some nerve-thread of surviving attachment to evil, and by unwelcome processes must you find deliverance from the sinister momentums of established habit. If pain has to come, we like to get it over as soon as possible, so that the opening horizon may be cloudless. The wrath is but for a moment, and the spirit shall be saved in the day of Jesus Christ. Let God choose your pains. It is better to fall into the hands of the Lord than into those of an earthly penance-measurer. Men who have a deep sense of sin are sometimes tempted to impose pains and penalties upon their own flesh. The late Dr. Pusey, a genuine saint with a twisted and morbid temperament, was ever beseeching his confessor to impose a more racking penance, a bitterer rule of life, so that he might conquer his besetments and win God's favour. That is taking the work out of God's hand. No wise father allows his children to punish each other. God Himself is quite competent for the task of correcting us, and will not fail to ordain the needful humiliations.

What madness for any one to suppose that he can extract the uttermost pleasure out of this life, avoiding all the disciplines and privations that come upon those who fear God, and then find in the last ebbing hours, through the all-sufficient work of Jesus, immunity from the woes of the world to come! God is not mocked, and such an idea is self-refuted. The righteous are scarcely saved. Let those who are entering upon life repudiate all such illusions. Your usefulness may be discounted by the false steps of your opening career. The fitness for high achievement may be lost through inward or outward sin. The transgression God has blotted from His book may still scar the flesh and rob the last recompense of its surpassing splendour. Retributive righteousness will not be without its recognition in the very life of heaven.

V

HUMAN ESTIMATES OF THE DIVINE FORGIVENESS

"She loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."—LUKE vii. 47.

THE incident which gave rise to the parable applied in these words is of commanding interest for two reasons: it shows the unfaltering large-heartedness with which Jesus vindicated a place for restored transgressors in that Divine society of which He is the head; and it further shows the influence acquired by the Great Teacher over the more open-minded Pharisees of His time. The devotees of the Jewish ceremonial were not all impervious to His message. He touched some men in a class officially hostile to his claims, although in a less striking degree than men in the despised classes.

It has been a fashion with some interpreters of the third Gospel to depict Simon as crafty, hostile, cunning, and to see in his invitation a deep-laid scheme for entangling Jesus in the toils of His adversaries. That view is discredited by the terms of the parable. The fifty-pence debtor is an outline sketch of the character of Simon, who has a vague and inadequate sense of his obligation to that forgiving grace of

which Jesus Christ is the minister. His experiences of the Divine mercy, although ill-defined and woefully circumscribed, he owed to this new Prophet and the invitation to dine was an expression of gratitude, although the expression did not go half far enough. The side-lights cast by the parable upon the temper and attitude of the man neither flatter him on the one hand nor unduly throw into shadow on the other. Simon the Pharisee was to some extent in grace—the parable concedes that—although his own appreciation of the fact was miserably qualified by self-esteem and the traditions of his training and of his class. He belonged for the moment to the superficial, fair-weather friends of Jesus. It is, of course, impossible to put him in the same high category as Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, or even Gamaliel. His position is perhaps intermediate between these honourable men and the fanatics who sought to effect the death of Jesus. He was a temporiser, or at least under the temptation to act that part. The sanctity of the Galilean had touched his conscience, and as a sincere man God-fearing according to his lights, he could not help sympathising with the good news of the kingdom. There were testimonies to the prophetic character of this new Reformer which could not be ignored. Living as did this Pharisee of the open house a little way to the east of the Jordan, he may have come within range of the Baptist's influences and participated in the expectations awakened by the wilderness preaching. The man had a tiny store of love and good-will to Jesus, inspired by the gospel of forgiveness, which store he dealt out with studied parsimony. Something was due to Jesus for the hopes His mission had inspired, and reflective moods

came to Simon when he felt that after all he might require a little of the grace bestowed through Jesus, although perhaps not quite so much as others. It may be that the special side of our Lord's ministry which looked towards publicans and sinners chilled the zeal of Simon and brought into his faith an element of reserve.

The welcome Simon accorded to his guest was far from cordial for two or three reasons. There were other guests in the room to whose opinion the host was unduly sensitive and who perhaps wished to show Jesus no more countenance than they could help. Their attitude was strictly critical. Simon was afraid of making himself absurd in the eyes of comrades and underlings by warmth, effusiveness, plebeian enthusiasm. To play the part of serene patron and dilute his friendliness by acts of studied oversight seemed the politic course to take. He was ashamed of Jesus in the superior world to which he belonged and would not show an undue deference which might almost have the significance of discipleship. And then he was not quite sure of his own mind. He vacillated from day to day in his judgment of Jesus Christ. He felt some kind of debt to this new prophet, but the debt was slight, and for him at least the gospel could not be a matter of life and death. This is but another way of saying what the parable conveys, that Simon lacked self-knowledge. He had not explored his own heart, but had simply looked into the depth and the shadow through a chink in the door. If this Pharisee had attained a more adequate sense of his own shortcoming and a fuller appreciation of the free forgiving love offered to all men, he would have honoured Jesus more.

And thus it was that Simon put a slight upon one who would now be welcomed with homage and fervent gratitude by millions, even in lands not calling themselves by the Christian name. This stiff and stately Jew was doing more than entertain angels unawares; he was entertaining the Lord of the angels and he played the part of patron to his wonderful guest. His wary frigidity betrayed him into a blunder that will make him pitied and despised to the end of time. Perhaps it might have been better not to invite the prophet at all than to invite and wound by supercilious neglect. Meet honour paid to Jesus as a guest might have proved an unconscious worship effectual in due time to the fuller saving of the soul.

The weak, oft-halting quality of the Pharisee's faith shows itself at two points in the story. His omission of the usual forms of courtesy used by the host to his guests had a moral significance. It implied a dearth of right feeling towards Jesus, a lack of unstinted graciousness at the root of the character. It was not a mere slight put upon the lowly origin of the carpenter-prophet and His motley discipleship, because the Jewish reverence for genuine religious gifts was unfavourable to the growth of such snobbishness. In spite of his hospitality Simon fell below the standard of those observances prescribed by the popular sentiment of the community for his gratitude was not whole-hearted, and his faith was so ill-defined he scarcely knew in what rank of the prophets or rabbis to class his guest. These ungracious manners were a sign to the outside world that in spite of this invitation Simon had not made the complete surrender of discipleship and a proof to

Jesus that the host after all was but lukewarm in his love. The Master Himself was ideal courtesy, not because He had read up a little code of etiquette, but because He was full of good-will to the men He had come to save and honoured them for the promise that was in them. Winsome and faultless manners are always a fruit of ideal love. Courtesies may sometimes be hollow and unreal, especially when prescribed by a class and acquired by drill. It is the reaction against this which has led some of our own countrymen to glorify boorishness. We recoil from the empty etiquettes of the East, and resent perhaps even the laboured politeness of some of our Continental neighbours, and by bluntness, grating manners, and rasping speech, try to establish a reputation for honesty and candour. But the world is not so simple as we assume, and rarely accepts roughness, truculence, disdain of etiquette, as proof presumptive of superior truth, probity, faithfulness. A man is not a Martin Luther, a Dr. Samuel Johnson, or even a Thomas Carlyle, because he sets himself to imitate some of the skin-deep blemishes of these famous men. If fashionable codes of courtesy have become too artificial and elaborate for our sense of reality, genuine kindness and good-will cannot fail to make for themselves new forms of observance which will more than satisfy the requirements of our social life. Courtesy, as Jesus reminded Simon, is the fruit of an evangelical experience, and scant courtesy often means scant experience. It proved the littleness of this Pharisee's love, and little love was the concomitant of an infirm and wavering faith.

The Pharisee perhaps had done less than justice to his own faith by these calculated incivilities, and

now an event occurs which almost proves its death-blow. Jesus has been assuming towards outcasts from virtuous society a new attitude with which Simon is not entirely pleased ; and an illustration of this objectionable phase in his policy occurs at the feast itself. His growing faith in the prophetic office of his guest must at least be harmonised with the conventions of the reputable, and if that is impossible so much the worse for his faith. When this woman with a past intrudes and lavishes upon the much-talked-of guest her profuse devotion, Simon is tempted to deny Jesus a place in the goodly fellowship of the prophets. He assumes that as Samuel read the dissimulation in the heart of Saul, and Elisha detected the deceit of Gehazi, so ought Jesus to have read the history of this shameless wanton, and have promptly repelled her touch. Rumour said that He practised the disagreeable habit of putting His hand upon lepers ; but, worse and worse, he lets a moral leper kiss His feet. Simon's implacable attitude towards the woman was part and parcel of his defective faith in Jesus, the Friend and Restorer of the lost. He would not admit the possibility of such a creature's penitence nor regard as reasonable the idea of her final salvation. He looks upon her probation as closed, and thinks of her deserts as those of a lost soul. His haughty bearing towards his guest is petrified into fixed and virulent aversion towards this person who crept under Christ's shadow as under the shadow of a shield. The contact must contaminate, and if He be the prophet asserted by many, He must surely be cognisant of the scandal and shame cleaving to this kneeling woman and her unholy touch. The fact that this profuse devotion

was unrebuked proved clearly that Jesus knew no more about the secrets of character than common observers, perhaps less. He ought to have drawn Himself together as though the shadow of the plague had crept through the doorway and hustled this woman from His presence. Simon and his friends were secretly scandalised, and for the moment it seemed scarcely possible that the weak faith of the Pharisee could survive the shock.

And yet Simon had a lingering latency of faith that left him more or less dissatisfied with his own interpretation of this anomaly in the prophet's character. Perhaps he felt misgivings about the methods current in his class of grouping all flagrant sinners with lost souls and defaming those who would help and befriend them. He was prepared to hear Jesus at greater length upon the point, and to weigh any explanations He might think fit to advance. In reply to Christ's appeal for permission to speak a parable, with personal applications, he extends to Him perfect liberty, thinking perhaps, at the same time, that any statement tending to mitigate these disturbing doubts will be welcome, up to a certain point. The tolerant *bonhomie* of the host blends itself with the candour of the inquirer. "Master, say on." Let us be just to the Pharisee. He had no wish to close the lips of one who might be a prophet. He was a pale forerunner of the robust Puritans and Reformers who wrote upon the liberty of prophesying, and to the right of free speech so handsomely conceded by this host tens of thousands will be indebted until the end of time. We owe this special parable of comfort and instruction to the fact that Simon could not bring himself to gag a possible prophet, with

whom for the present he was not quite at one. Intolerance can never further the honour of Jesus Christ or help forward the salvation of a single soul.

The woman who followed Jesus into the house of Simon to pay Him her tribute of homage and passionate devotion was one for whose past no apology was possible. The Evangelist refers to it with a reticence worthy of imitation in some branches of modern literature. Her conduct was notorious throughout the town. But she was drawn to Jesus by the fact that He was a deliverer. Under the spell of His ministry she felt it might be possible to surmount the miserable degradation of the past. She approached the Master with every sign of contrition—an aspect of the case which all but escaped the notice of the Pharisee and his friends. The name of Jesus is sometimes lightly invoked for the defence of those who in their lives affront the first principles of domestic morality and who show little or no sense of wrong-doing. But the name of this holy Teacher is profaned when its authority is cited to condone the fast man in his gallantries and the loose woman in her defiant license. When we plead the precedents of Christ's ministry we should make quite sure that those for whom we become apologists give adequate hostages for their amendment, like this poor woman who touched the Lord and was unrebuked. In the grace Jesus extended to His penitent there was nothing that could relax or demoralise, for she came with poignant expressions of regret for the past. The man who, in the temper of harsh, inexorable virtue, despises the sighing of the contrite and tramples roughly upon a broken heart is one who abets immorality and makes amendment well-nigh

impossible. To leave all higher questions out of sight for the moment : which is the better moralist of the two—Jesus, who extends a helping hand to the fallen woman as she is stumbling to her feet again ; or Simon, who plants thorns in the pathway that leads back to virtue and leaves a daughter of Abraham, with hot tears on her face, at the parting of the ways, to return to her old haunts and corrupt the community once more? A more fatuous and incapable reformer of a degenerate people than Simon it would be hard to imagine.

The confession of her past wrong was public, courageous, and whole-hearted. She knew the hostile criticism which Jesus had to face, and was jealous for His spotless name, so would not compromise the Divine Friend by private interview and a recital secretly whispered into His ear. She might have deferred her act of homage and submission till Jesus was in the street or by the wayside again, and surely it would have been easier there than in that citadel of austere virtue, the house of an eminent Pharisee. In such a place and at such a time she could expect nothing but scorn. But the contrition was heroic, and she did not shrink from a heavy cross. By this act of public penitence she not only cut herself loose from all the associations of the past, but cast her whole being upon the merciful and efficacious advocacy of the one guest at the feast upon whom she could count. Misgivings may have disturbed her as she formed her project of stealing in upon a scene where virtue was a haunting ghost rather than a guardian angel ; but she could anticipate her absolution, for she knew the spirit of the Master's teaching. Already there was glowing within her soul the love

which the Divine mercy itself kindles, and she paid a homage to which Simon scarcely felt himself constrained. Thrilled with gratitude to Him whose presence of grace had unsealed the fountain of her tears and given her back the heart of a child, she did not cease to kiss His feet. The heart-offering of this discredited woman was just as precious as the gold, frankincense, and myrrh of the wise men. Love refines the vulgar selfishness of our first contrition into acceptable worship and with the dawn of love the faith is achieved which both saves and sanctifies. She had a prophetic sense of the accord between her own hopes and the mercy of Jesus, and for the sake of Him who had come to this town and to this very feast to heal the soul-wounds that were awaiting his skill she is willing to abase herself, to dare all, to surrender all. How could Jesus dismiss from His presence one who was beginning to fulfil the heart of the commandment which the Pharisee was laboriously striving to observe only in the letter, and that with imperfect success?

The parable is *Christ's answer to the secret criticisms* which were disturbing Simon's peace of mind and *the key to a right judgment of the spiritual states of the Pharisee and the despised penitent.* It is needless to say how delicate was the method of handling the situation created by this intrusion. The Master proves Himself courteous, tactful, generous to both sides, and a true interpreter of the mind of God. His temper stamps Him with authority. It seems impossible to provoke Him to rudeness and asperity. As He pursues His benign vocation He seems for the moment quite regardless of these offensive slights. He has too high a sense of His

saving mission to imperil its results by impetuous retaliations. So mindful are we of our self-respect, that if a crowned king were to offer us a hospitality intermediate between an act of almsgiving to the needy and a complimentary dinner, we should decline to take our seats at the table. Jesus was more affectionate and sensitive than any of us, and in no sense proof against the pain given by these careless omissions. But He was royal in His self-restraint and exercised over His own speech a command quite as severe as that which He seeks to enforce upon us. He asks from His host the privilege of frank, personal speech, and will not venture upon the give and take which may sometimes be permitted to those who sit at the same table. He wants to cherish the faint beginnings of grace in Simon, as well as to strengthen the goings of this saved woman in the paths of truth and righteousness, and His fidelity becomes wondrous kind. There is no angry rating of Simon for his shortcomings, but every excuse is made. Jesus concedes a degree of genuine love to Himself and a partial participation in that salvation of which He is the appointed minister. He will accept even the Pharisee's view of the comparative blamelessness of the life He has lived according to the law, premising, of course, that in the life of the best of us there is some little space within which the Divine mercy must manifest itself. Jesus is in the house of Simon the Pharisee, and He will do His best to put Himself into the innermost recesses of Simon's mind.

The judgment which illuminates this parable of the two debtors and drives home its applications is superhuman in its clear, penetrating truth. Jesus

dispels the scepticism of Simon by showing that He not only knows the guilt of this profligate woman who kneels at His feet, but he knows also the insidious heart-sin of Simon, effectually hidden though it was from friends and neighbours. Like others of his school, Simon had broken up the law into minute enactments, and his acts of lawlessness had been reduced by this method to all but inappreciable dimensions, whilst the possibility of spiritual sin had almost passed out of his reckoning. For His knowledge of the respective liabilities incurred by the two debtors Jesus is not dependent upon common rumour, for rumour would have pronounced Simon faultless. The discourse proves that God's book of remembrance is open to the eye of Him who speaks the parable, and Simon's doubt is more than answered. Jesus fulfils the prophetic character as it had never been realised before. After the parable had been applied, it is those who sit at meat who venture upon a new campaign of criticism, whilst Simon, whose soul has been searched, sits in silence. The parable anticipates the fresh murmurs provoked by this absolving word to the woman. He who can read the thoughts of these two persons who stand at contrasted poles, representing the maximum and the minimum of human transgression, can interpret the mind of the great God on high and convey into human experience a sense of His rich and boundless compassions. He speaks with equal truth and authority of human sin in all its degrees, and of the free and effectual remedy which God has made ready for it. Surely Simon himself must have been brought by this appeal into partial accord with the large-hearted methods of the Son of Man, and have been

convinced that he had this day committed a new sin which needed forgiveness, in scorning one who had gone further in her discovery of the love of God in Christ Jesus than himself. When Jesus dismissed this woman from His presence with a deep, priceless peace in her heart and the sun shining from a cloudless sky upon her pathway, Simon at least has no word or thought of protest. What a wise and tender Friend and Advocate this woman had! He could stop every lip that would have condemned, and assert an unchallenged place for a poor exiled soul in the kingdom of heaven. If He could so plead with proud, unfeeling, pitiless censors for a mourning offender and carry His cause, may we not accept Him without fear as our Advocate before the throne of a pitiful Father?

In His treatment of this incident our Lord enunciates the principle that *the love which fulfils the law arises from a specific forgiveness* authoritatively conveyed to the consciousness. Of that forgiveness He is the Mediator, inasmuch as the gratitude which it evokes must show itself in devotion to Himself. A doctrine of assurance is intertwined with the texture of the parable, because it is our persuasion of God's grace to us which admits of degrees rather than the act of forgiveness in the mind of God. When God forgives He forgives absolutely; but the experience of this fact varies with the individual. The blessing of the Divine forgiveness is a vast world put into our possession, but some souls explore and open up that world with a clearer knowledge and a more intrepid faith than others. Indeed our sense of the place forgiving mercy must fill in our lives enlarges itself with the successive

stages of our religious development. When men come into the fellowship of Jesus, love must be the dominant motive of their lives, but a denial of the impartial privilege of assurance implies that the fear which hath torment should be a more prominent and abiding force in the life than love. For us at least who are born in sin, the service of God must begin with an apprehension of the lovingkindness which blots out our transgression. We must file our petition as defaulters, the self-satisfied Simon and the woman whom Simon spurned alike. We are in the same condemnation, and when we escape its durance it is not because of an appreciable difference in our indebtedness, but through the free bounty of God. For life and liberty we await His absolving word. It is a humiliating fact that we cannot love God in our unregeneracy because of what He is in Himself, nor yet for His mercy to others. Indeed mercy shown to those who seem less deeply involved in dishonoured obligations than ourselves sometimes makes it harder for us to love God and accept His methods, as was the case with Simon. And yet even Simon was not without a secret sense of sin. His very observances were an admission of the fact that there were shortcomings needing to be made good, and he felt that when he had done his utmost there would still be a little space in his life for the exercise of that Divine forgiveness preached by Jesus. He accepted the verdict of Jesus in ranking him with God's helpless debtors, for he was content if Jesus would only allow a wide gap between himself and the woman. Simon had many discoveries to make in the way of self-knowledge, and perhaps a day would come when he would not think the gap

between himself and the woman so great after all. His inadequate sense of the range of the Divine forgiveness in his life was determined by inadequate spiritual sensitiveness.

The problem raised in this story and the parable which illuminates it is of enduring interest. It reappears in the present day, and sometimes as a temptation. It often happens that the man who has sinned vilely and has afterwards passed through a conversion sharp as the contrast between dungeon and noonday, loves much, excelling in devoted and unwearying service; whilst another who has been kept from grave outward sin and has passed by insensible steps into the kingdom, seems cold, self-restrained, dispassionate, rendering to the cause of Jesus Christ a service less expressive than the other. *Does early sin stimulate future holiness?* Has the dissolute person acquired a capability for grateful devotion the other lacks? Are moral people debarred from those greater degrees of love now and again attained by those whose flagrant misdemeanours have been blotted out? Is it better to be the woman with the shameful past, or Simon of wholesome life and blameless reputation? The question sometimes gives rise to the diabolic thought, "Sin boldly, so that the restoration to God's favour may be more impressive. The greater the debt the more passionate will be the gratitude for its removal. Transgress impiously, so that the religious sensibilities may one day come to have a keener edge." It is needless to say that in this parable Jesus gives no colour whatever to such antinomian sophistries. He is not speaking of the absolute amount of sin which had burdened the life of either of these

persons, nor even of the absolute degree of the pardoning love vouchsafed to the one or the other. He takes Simon and the woman on the ground of their respective admissions, and deals with the different measures of grace of which they have become more or less conscious. Simon thought that forgiving mercy needed to manifest itself only in a little corner of his life, whilst the woman thought it needed to cover the entire area of her guilty past. With the growth of knowledge and experience, Simon might come to think of himself no longer as a fifty-pence debtor. Saul of Tarsus in the days of his legal righteousness had quite as good an opinion of himself as Simon the Pharisee, and according to conventional interpretations of the law was indeed blameless. But he made his journey to Damascus, and in the course of time we find that he writes himself down "the chief of sinners." He was willing to place himself on the same level as the washed delinquents of the Corinthian Church. He would have been content to take a meaner seat at the feast than the woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears. He would have unloosed the shoe-latchet of the dying thief. It was not because he had been saved from a defiant breach of social morality, but because he had come to know himself and to realise the culminating guilt of setting himself against the great Redeeming Lord.

Simon was straitened in himself and in his sense of grateful love because he had got *the habit of looking upon the virtues he had exemplified for years as his own,* rather than as God's gift within him. If he had entertained just views of himself and of his relation to God he would have felt that it was by no power of

his own he had been kept from vice, and that his obligation to the Divine favour was just as deep as that of the loose woman strangely restored by the ministry of Jesus Christ. So blinded was he by spiritual pride that he could not see the hand which held him up and kept him from stumbling. He had sometimes walked, like the rest of us, in perilous and slippery paths, but he forgot that his innate weakness was upheld by Divine power, and had assumed that it was to his own credit he had walked so safely. It takes as much grace to keep us in untarnished innocence, silly and wayward that we are, as to pardon us when we have flagrantly erred. This is the point of view from which the temptation to sin that grace may abound must be met. Our debt of gratitude is just as great to those who by the wise administration of sanitary laws keep disease from our homes, as to the doctor who watches by our side and puts himself between us and the grave, although the fact does not always impress the imagination to the same extent. The mercy which shields the innocence of childhood and youth from canker and contamination is just as infinite as the mercy which washes white the scarlet stains of repentant profligacy. Simon thought that he had kept himself from the world by fasting, self-discipline, and a diligent use of the forms of prayer, but he was entitled to far less praise than he imagined. If he had recognised this foundation-truth of a grace which is eternal, manifold in its forms and all-encircling, he would not have put a formidable chasm between himself and a fellow-mortal. Let it never be forgotten that those who are kept through life in consistent outward obedience to the Commandments are under obligations

of gratitude and love as deep and manifold as the obligations resting upon those who are as "brands plucked from the burning."

But to complete his self-knowledge and enlarge his consciousness of the Divine forgiveness *Simon needed a quickened sense of the inwardness of all moral actions.* His soul had been deadened by the formalism of years, and he was only just becoming aware of the fact that God's laws were intended to regulate the spirit as well as the acts of the external life. His failure to feel much compunction for inward sin was a sign that he had not yet come into the secret place of the Most High. He was familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures, and he might have remembered that the saints of early days felt their guilt upon a scale to which he and the men of his school were strangers. In the presence of the terrible mount Moses did "exceedingly fear and quake." Job and Isaiah "abhorred" themselves when God's presence burned itself into their souls, and lamented their uncleanness; whilst Simon Peter, at the first glimpse of Christ's superhuman power, exclaimed, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." And Paul's new sense of sin was planted within him by the same process. If such men had been asked, Which of the commandments have you transgressed? they would have said, Our inward attitude has been one of opposition to God's counsels, our secret tempers and dispositions have been woefully estranged, and memories of many omissions and imperfect motives so take hold upon us that we cannot look up. Simon's distance from Jesus and from the God it was the work of Jesus to manifest, the fact that he treated as a stranger One who was

the shrine of the Eternal holiness and love, left him in the gray, chilly gloaming, self-centred, built up in the past, invincibly complacent.

It is this revelation of God which makes us see that character must be tried by spiritual tests, and that true righteousness is inward. Jesus affirmed this in the Sermon on the Mount, but His living presence brought home the lesson to the conscience and produced the same self-abasing effects as the theophanies of olden time. Simon was an adept in applying the law of the letter and accounted breaches of social morality as more glaring in their enormity than secret sins against the redeeming will of God—a way of judging which makes the community greater than God. That error is not uncommon in our own day and generation. We are hot against sins which threaten the interests of the community or the nation, but evade as far as possible any judgment upon sins which conflict with the honour of God and the spiritual sovereignty of His Son, especially when those sins lie, like long-settled dust, within the unvisited and innermost recesses of our own hearts.

Indifference to the fact of inward sin, especially when it is joined with harshness to a weeping penitent and disaffection towards the Lord who would fain uplift her, is the mark of a very imperfect salvation. We need to bestir ourselves if there are callous tracks in our natures which are unresponsive to the finer laws of the Most High and the amazing benignities of His operations. It is said that one of the Latin kings of Jerusalem, known in history as Baldwin the Leper, was a fair and comely lad, and that no one dreamed of the evil which lay hidden in his flesh. The discovery came about in a singular way. He

was playing with a group of noble lads of the same age, and they were trying who could bear the largest amount of pinching without cry of pain ; and it was found that Baldwin was the most heroic of the lot. In fact he had little or no sense of pain. The lack of feeling in his limbs was as sure a proof of the dire disease at work there as though his features had been blotched beyond recognition and joint had been dropping from joint. And in spite of the fact that Simon had enjoyed some little foretaste of God's forgiving grace, the dulness of some of the tracks of his moral life, the fact that he should have looked upon himself as without grave or multiplied offence, that he should have regarded this sobbing penitent as belonging to an inferior order of life, stamped him as a victim of disastrous inward mischief in spite of the outward comeliness of his character. Unless he could come to juster views of himself and allot a larger place in his life to God's forgiving compassions, he might yet be numbered with those who receive the grace of God in vain. We have no need to envy the outwardly rebellious that quicker self-knowledge which sometimes comes to them at a most terrible cost. As we pass from stage to stage of spiritual development, we shall find that God is always seeking, by more vivid disclosures of His presence, to give to us a quickened moral consciousness, a deeper and a more humiliating insight into our own shortcoming, and a larger and a more grateful realisation of the surpassing love which has blotted out our uncounted sins.

This parable has been made a theological battle-ground, one school of writers arguing that it teaches justification by works, since Jesus forgave the woman

because of her devoted love; and another school affirming that when Jesus, in the last words of the colloquy, said to the distracted woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee," He gave His authority to the great Reformation watchword—Justification by Faith. That Jesus should teach a doctrine of human merit in a parable intended to make a Pharisee realise that he also was indebted to God's forgiving grace is inconceivable. Upon any such theory of interpretation the parable is inconsistent, for the five hundred pence debtor is allowed to discharge some part of her own liabilities. But if we remember there can be neither faith without love nor love without faith, the apparent discrepancy between the two texts will disappear. An American writer describes in one of her stories the early history of a poor, forlorn girl who was suffering from arrested brain-development, but who was taken into an informal school for waifs and strays, opened by a group of benevolent ladies. The leader of the enterprise was known as Mistress Mary. After months of baffling discouragement and painstaking toil the child's faculties began to show signs of growth, and she gave many proofs both of affection and intelligence. For some time past she had constituted herself the guardian of two troublesome children who had been, if possible, more forlorn and neglected than herself. One day the twins were missing, and their half-witted guardian, with a conscience troubled by the loss, wandered off into the slums of San Francisco to search for them. For half a day the search was vain. At last she found them in a cheap clothing factory, where an alarm of fire had just been raised. She rushed in through the door, and without much difficulty brought back into

the street one of her charges, and then went back to rescue the other. Rushing up a staircase, ready to burst into flames, she presented herself at the window of one of the upper storeys, holding the second lost child by the hand. To come back down the staircase was impossible. At the bidding of the crowd in the street below she threw the child, without much ado, into the blanket four strong men held out to receive it. The fire-escape was not yet in sight, so they called, "Now leap yourself." But she looked down and was petrified by fright, for she knew not the voice of strangers. At length Mistress Mary appeared upon the scene, and appreciating the peril of the situation, she cried in a clear, sweet voice that rose above the din of the crowd, "Leap, darling, leap!" The half-paralysed child saw in the lady's hair a shining ornament she had often patted, and recognised the well-known voice. The catalepsy of fright was dissolved; she leaped, swooning as she fell through the air, but was saved. Was that faith or love, or a mysterious and inseparable union of the two? We cannot have faith without love, and we cannot have love without faith. "She loved much." "Thy faith hath saved thee."

VI

SIN CONFESSED AND FORGIVEN

"If we confess our sin, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse from all unrighteousness."—1 JOHN i. 9.

CONFESSION is the outward and detailed expression of our repentance. Repentance looks back upon the past and deplores its errors, whilst at the same time it looks into the future and seeks to rule its coming issues by vows of amendment. Man is a deathless entity, and can no more afford to forget the past than he can venture to neglect the future. Fresh starts towards the goal of virtue without the confession which takes account of our yesterdays might be possible if the faculty of memory were not the very keystone of the human mind. By lowly confession the memory not only discharges the burdens that have harassed it but the soul struggles to free itself from a bygone taint which is an omen of interminable mischief. Confession is a mark of reviving moral sensibility within us, and it is only when this mark appears that the Divine attributes can take complete hold of us for our help and salvation.

Our confession is due chiefly to God Himself

because He is most profoundly aggrieved by our offences; but confession may be due also to those who are about us. The higher duty does not exclude the lower, but is inseparably bound up with it. We may have wronged our neighbours by specific acts, by acts also that cannot perhaps be put into a bill of costs, but that are not to be dismissed as sentimental grievances. It may be a master's duty to humble himself to a servant, a parent's duty to humble himself to a child, a sovereign's duty to deplore his errancies to the subjects who have suffered through them. No disparity of position affects the incidence of the duty. Till the reconciliation has taken place of which confession is a chief part, it may be that God will withdraw himself from the altar before which we have placed our gift. Conscience must rule where the duty begins and ends, and pride must not dispute its verdict. Others may have been misled by our evil example whilst we have lived in alienation from God's perfect law, and the responsibilities which inhere in our social relationships make it imperative for us to undo as far as possible the mischief of the past. Confession does not accomplish much, but it is an effort towards that end. If we are resolved to enter upon the new life we can only make our position as God's servants clear by obedience to this duty. It will clear our career from misinterpretation and assure the bystanders that we have sought cleansing rather than whitewash. A religious profession always incurs the reproach of Pharisaism from a watching world, and the confession of past sin at the outset, including as it does reparation in spirit as well as in deed to those who may have been either directly or indirectly

wronged by our past folly and selfishness, is the best answer we can give to that reproach. Prejudice against confession to a priest must not be allowed to blind us to the duty of that confession we often owe to each other.

But this unshrinking self-abasement and admission of wrong is pre-eminently due to God Himself. God would be compromised if he accepted men whose lips had never moved in accents of confession, and Christianity would sink to the level of the non-ethical religions of the world. The gospel makes such royal gifts to the vile, the tainted, and the outcast that it must insist on open penitence in all those who receive the fulness of its promises. There is no atoning virtue, no compensating efficacy, no propitiating grace in this fruit of a sincere repentance, but it is inseparable from the experiences of the new life of grace.

Honesty is the basis of all intellectual knowledge, and it must necessarily precede our initiation into the consciousness of a new life. Forgiveness can neither be bestowed by God nor received by us unless it open the way at once for purification from sin, and such purification cannot take place in a nature which colours the past at the bidding of its own specious pride. All the facts must be reckoned with, be they patent or obscure. In the confession required from us as we stand upon the threshold of the kingdom we reaffirm the distinctions of right and wrong, and that is the very least we can do. When God is about to deal with us wondrously by the great principle of grace, He cannot allow the impression to go forth that grace cancels the Divine law or abates one iota of its significance. A penitent's confession

acknowledges that the law he slighted was holy, just, and good. We cannot juggle ourselves into salvation by disputing the condemnation under which we brought ourselves. It is said that a tribe of natives near the sources of the Congo have been so much accustomed to twist and twirl, when walking through the forest, to escape the obstructions which lie in their pathway, that the habit persists when they get into the open. They move in serpent-like tracks and find it all but impossible to walk in straight lines. We see in some men moral habits not unlike that tribal idiosyncrasy. They are evasive, apologetic, inclined to shirk unpleasant facts, and palliate or excuse their own misdoings. They are averse from taking the straight path back to God. But no prodigal, be he of the genteel or of the tattered order, a prodigal of the gilded clubs or a prodigal of the slums, can ever twist back under cover to the father's house. Nor can he come back in the brave borrowed robes of a prosperous comrade, serenading the household with his frivolous minstrelsies. If he were to come in such a fashion the evil past would soon lose its power of repelling him. The furtive penitent would become a furtive visitor to the unholy world again. He must come in his rags, by the front path, and in full view of the household. Indeed he would have missed the father's welcome unless he had so come and have quickly forgotten his miserable surfeit of sin. The past must be seen in its true colours, and no dreamy and specious mirage can be suffered to superimpose itself over the gaunt, painful facts. Confession admits the evil of all dishonourable gain, the meanness of all pretence, the degradation of all illicit pleasure, the baseness of every penny

of the profit that comes through the loss of others. There can be no honest basis for our relations with either God or man without confession.

Confession is the element in our repentance which offers some faint earnest of its permanence. To some extent it guarantees an amended future. Many a man relapses into his old habits of evil because he has tried to enter into a furtive salvation, not preceded by an unreserved acknowledgment of his sin. We might as well give latchkeys to the inmates of an inebriate home and authorise them to oscillate between an area of restriction and the gin-shop, as hope for a sinner to enter upon the new life of holiness without making his shame-stricken confession as he draws near to the threshold. He must lock himself from the past and throw away the key giving access to its unwholesome allurements. By the processes of confession the humiliating lessons of our bygone folly are brought home to us, and we are safeguarded against the wilfulness and infatuation that have devastated the earlier chapters of our history. The transgressor is always ready to repeat the act he will never admit to be flagrantly wrong. Indeed some of us would write down many of the acts of the past as guilty and shameful, but we keep them in the category of doubtful things because we are not sure that one day we may not wish to repeat them. Confession openly buoys the rock on which we once split, and if we ignore the beacon sign we shall be likely to founder there once again. When we leave the past undefined and undescribed that implies there will be much the same kind of thing in the near future. The man who comes into Christ's kingdom to stay must needs come honestly. He cannot escape

the condemnation of the past by the method of the secret stowaway. Now and again the stowaway may be honest, but the presumption is against him. If he does not perish miserably as he is battened down in the hatches the probability is he will be handed over to the representatives of the law at the first place to which the ship comes. Every man must book in his own name. The man who for one reason or another wishes to come into a state of grace without meeting this condition is a capricious rover and will not be likely to continue in that state.

It is only *through confession that the heart is opened up to all the operations of God's renewing grace.* The balm of love cannot by any chance diffuse its healing virtue through a nature haughty, reticent, self-contained. The egoist is beyond redemption whilst he lives up to his defiant name. In the processes of a proud self-justification the soul closes its tentacles over the poison of sin that has been lodged within it. By honest self-abasement it ejects that poison and makes itself accessible to new tides of life and spiritual health. In many towns and villages of India the grim spirit of caste has kept the Government doctors out of the plague-stricken homes, whose thresholds they would gladly have crossed on missions of help and salvation. An inexorable custom forbade them to enter zenanas that were fast becoming sepulchres of rottenness and death. The hands of many generations had fixed an impassable veil. Unwholesome conditions may prevail there, and human life fester and waste away, but the delivering angel himself would not be welcomed, if he came in European clothes. The apartments are jealously closed, and the evil must be left to take its

course. And is it not thus with the spirit of pride which keeps out the Physician of Nazareth and declines His ministry of salvation? We are the whole, and need not His help. And thus by specious self-complacencies we seal up our souls against His skill and tenderness, and make vain His heaven-sent remedies. Confession is the act which unbars the door by which He enters, and just as long as we restrain our confession the door shuts Him out as relentlessly as triple gates of brass. To help a proud man is often a task that defies the wisdom of the wisest amongst us. If he is vain of his knowledge you cannot teach him. If he is vain of his strength you cannot support him, even when he is ready to faint. If he has made his boast of wealth, he will feel little gratitude when you have succeeded in saving him from imminent insolvency, and will try to demonstrate that he has shown you a favour in accepting assistance, for when the tide has turned he will repay your service with munificent interest. You will see on which side the obligation rests, when he has made you a Crœsus. And the man who is spiritually proud cannot receive God's forgiveness. He will look upon his debt to the law of grace as momentary, whilst he lives in a romantic future of consummate virtue when God will be almost his debtor. He does not say so much as that, but such vague thoughts lodge within him which he scarcely ventures to formulate. The gracious, unboasting humility which can alone accept the riches of the Divine lovingkindness is cradled in confession.

That sense of forgiveness, which is one of the purifying forces of the new life, *must be preceded by the sense of sin*, and the sense of sin becomes defined

and articulate through the discipline of confession. A base-line is just as necessary for spiritual as for astronomical measurements. If we are to know the length and breadth, the depth and height of the love of God, which is the secret of sanctification, we must begin to measure it from the scale of our proved demerit. The Laodicean who said, "I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing," lacked this initial base-line, and shirked the duty of confession. No wonder that his love was so lukewarm that it provoked the contemptuous rejection of the redeeming Lord. We can have no true and inspiring appreciation of forgiveness till we have an inwrought, strongly defined conviction of our unworthiness. It is never God's purpose to bestow upon us a forgiveness to which we are insensible, for that would be to waste the gift and make it ethically fruitless. It would have no more practical value for us than the coin put by heathen people into the hand of the corpse to pay toll in the underworld. The sense of redeeming love must be grafted upon that sense of sin which asserts itself in lowly and shame-stricken confession. If a debtor persistently disputes the justice of some claim lodged against his estate, and a munificent friend discharges his liabilities, he will feel little or no gratitude for release from an obligation he did not admit to be proven. He would, perhaps, have preferred the privilege of fighting the claim to the very end, and resents the misguided generosity which deprived him of that peculiar form of satisfaction. If we are to feel aright all that we owe to God's mercy in Jesus Christ, we must first of all feel our debt to the broken law and the degree of our heinous shortcoming. The confession which reckons

up in order, as far as ignorant and careless creatures are able to do so at all, the sum of our dishonoured obligations, prepares us for the experiences of the new and better life to which we are introduced by our pitying God and Father.

In the special act of restoring us to the Divine favour *God must needs vindicate anew the honour of His own character*, and this He can only do through our confession of past offences. If upon less stringent terms He were to take us out of the slough of our baseness and set us amongst princes, He would bring suspicion upon His own integrity. These antecedent conditions are indispensable. Our neighbours and the wide world must know the terms upon which God enters into treaties of peace with the sinful. No public man can recognise a notorious enemy of the commonwealth and of humanity in general unless upon the basis of that enemy's capitulation. And God can never come into complete, immediate, practical amity with us till we acknowledge before the universe our trespasses against the authority of His holy law. It is sufficiently startling for the universe to see God treating with us at all. The Divine righteousness in the forgiveness of sin is not only vindicated primarily in the sacrifice of the Cross, but subordinately also by the individual confession of all who enter into the personal experience of its benefits. Against a forgiveness so prepared for, no impeachment can lie. If, when taking back shameful prodigals into His household, God ever dispensed with confession, that would justify the worst things that have been said about the demoralising tendency of a vicarious atonement. This is the fruit through which the atonement itself is accredited, that

it makes sin look blacker than it was before and constrains the outpouring of an unreserved and heart-broken acknowledgment of guilt. The true glory of the Cross is seen when it melts us into honest and shame-stricken confession. The philanthropist who wishes to commend his work to the support of the public photographs the waif and stray in his squalor and wolfishness as he emerges from a railway arch, and then photographs him again after he has been humanised, to show the marvellous change which has been wrought. In the confession asked from us before we pass into the light and warmth of God's home we are made to sit for our own picture and endorse it with our autograph, and the comparison which is possible when the new man dawns within us vindicates God's method and exalts His grace.

The man who makes confession of his sin will prove that *all the moral forces of the Divine nature are engaged to remit his condemnation and purify him from his depravities of heart and life.* When we once meet the requirements made of us the blessings of salvation are guaranteed to us by what God is in Himself. In spite of the tragic folly of the past, pardoned and inwardly rectified, we are started anew towards the great end for which God made us. The fidelity of God's imperishable Fatherhood begins to reveal itself with the first syllables of our stammering confession. He cannot cast off the soul into which He has once breathed the secret of life, when there is hope of sanctifying that soul and bringing it into fellowship with Himself. In the word which bears the stamp of His high authority He has pledged Himself to the

reclamation of every man who will turn again and admit his sin. Yea, He even honours the hopes which express themselves through the coarse, imperfect sacrifices of heathenism, for such sacrifices imply a vague desire of escape from guilt, and not a few heathen rites are mutilated copies of God's early word of promise. What God in diverse ways has spoken He will surely perform. He is faithful to us, faithful to His Son, whose work was undertaken upon a basis which in human language we describe as a compact or a covenant, faithful to Himself and His own high eternal counsels, for He cannot deny Himself. We need not be troubled by the question whether there is such a thing as verbal inspiration, or whether we have the precise words in which the holy men of old expressed God's mind, for His pledge comes to us in so many ways, and is so much a part of Himself, that we ought not to be in two minds about it. The Old Testament prophets described that larger religion they anticipated, which we call Christianity, as the New Covenant, because it consisted chiefly of obligations under which God was placing Himself. Its very laws bore a new complexion, and took upon themselves the qualities of promises. Weak and fickle men are only too common amongst us, who are ever trying to get free from their undertakings. They will excuse, repudiate, deny, cry off, and miss no possible loophole of escape. God's fidelity is so vital and insistent that He is ever searching and trying the hearts and reins of the children of men to find opportunity for fulfilling His engagements and proving Himself a God who never forgets His covenant promise. He employs the Sabbath upon which He has

entered in giving rest to the guilty and burdened. "Faithful to forgive . . . and to cleanse."

But *God's righteousness enlists Him on the side of our salvation* no less than His fidelity. It was once a fashion to speak as though righteousness and love were more or less antipathetic, pardon being often described as though it involved an affront to the great principle of justice or some compromise of its first claim. But if the forgiveness of sin is indeed the introduction to a new life of sanctification, the Divine righteousness is as much on the side of the penitent as the fidelity of God's lovingkindness. The very attribute that makes sure the punishment of the obdurate determines and confirms the absolution of the man who is honestly contrite. It must be so in the very nature of things if God is essentially zealous for righteousness, because one zealous for righteousness cannot lose a single opportunity of making it prevail. To refuse forgiveness to the sin which is confessed would be to perpetuate its ever-growing defilement. The born musician is distressed by the shrill discords of the streets and would gladly fill the world with melodies. The born artist is distressed by symptoms of staring ugliness and would remove every trace of it from our public buildings. You are never in doubt as to the way he will act. The humane and sympathetic man abhors the spectacle of pain and helps every movement which seeks to abate it in all orders of sentient life. And we need never be in doubt about the way in which a righteous God will deal with the sin we deplore. It is impossible for Him to leave His penitent children unshriven, unwashed, unrenewed. The whole weight of the Divine character impels

God to take the side of the man who confesses his sin. He has been watching His chance to save from condemnation and inbred wrongfulness, and He must first cease to be holy before He can close up to us the mystic and inexhaustible resources of His grace. "Righteous to forgive . . . and to cleanse."

The confession of sin is neither easy nor pleasant, and our pride recoils at the duty; but it leads into all the blessedness described by inspired prophets and apostles and promised by God to His believing servants from the beginning. The duty of confessing Christ as our Saviour implies an antecedent duty of throwing off our disguises and openly appearing in our real character as sinners needing a Saviour. The first confession leads on to the second and to all the blessedness linked with it. Bitter, mournful, shame-stricken acknowledgment of the wrong that has been cleaving to us in the past is the basis and preliminary condition of God's saving work within us.

It is said that in the inland territories of Arabia there are orchards and fruit trees, green tablelands and springing fountains of water, that it is indeed one of the richest and most beautiful countries in the world. But it is difficult to believe that as we watch its sterile, forbidding coasts. The port of Aden, touched at by most travellers to the East, gives an idea of what Tartarus itself must be like. The normal temperature is torment, even to those inured to the great heat of the tropics. Not a blade of grass is to be seen upon the hillsides, rain falls perhaps once in three or four years, verdureless rocks tower towards the molten heavens like pitiless rivals. And yet these sterile, forbidding, fire-scathed rocks are the gateway into a country fair as Eden and flowing with

milk and honey. So is it with this hard, inexorable, repugnant duty of confession. It is the grim gateway leading on to green pastures and still waters, to sabbatic rest and abounding blessedness. The more specific and outspoken our confession the better for our health of soul and for the rapidity and completeness of our spiritual restoration.

VII

THE MISTRUSTED FAITH

"Many believed on His name, beholding the signs which He did. But Jesus did not trust Himself to them, . . . for He Himself knew what was in man."—JOHN ii. 23–25.

FROM the beginning of His ministry Jesus had clearly defined within His own mind the kind of faith that was necessary to genuine discipleship and refused to approve specious forms of faith which failed to conform to His standard. He could make no terms whatever with the vulgar and unprofitable credulity so often called forth by signs. The craze for marvels shown by many in His generation He looked upon as the note of an "evil and adulterous" temper. When He Himself was moved to work miracles He put the accent of such achievements upon the benign purpose rather than upon the stupendous power they exemplified. Of course they marked him out, to all who would learn the lesson, as the messenger of the Father, in whose name they were wrought. That inner moral sympathy which made men feel the spell and authority of His message He counted as a truer earnest of saving faith than the amazement excited by His mighty works. Men of honest heart who

waited for the redemption of Israel, and their own, would not need to be constrained by either signs in the heavens or assertions of His supremacy over the forces of Nature. It is well for us to bear that lesson in mind at the present hour. The scientist asks for a demonstration of the soul and of immortality which the senses may examine and the spiritualist of this or the other cult says, "Follow me and I will satisfy the demand. The proof is psychic rather than ethical. Some of us have found the path by which we can pass out of the plane of the visible and feel the pulsations of the spirit world." Or, "The secret of healing possessed by Jesus is not reserved to Him and His apostles. Lo! here are our miracles. Come and be initiated into the mysteries." It is not necessary to enter into these controversies. For our present purpose let it suffice to say that the signs and wonders commended to us cannot possibly bring our generation nearer by a single step to that special quality of faith which Jesus wants from men, and which He has ever judged to be vital to human salvation. Faith begins in a movement of the conscience rather than in a new stimulation of the sense of wonder by the unveiling of those occult laws which enswathe us. The faith begotten by signs lacks that moral germ-cell out of which the life of sanctity must unfold itself. Jesus would not treat with the faith which was a tribute to His marvels, nor would He make terms with it. The faith which He meets with faith must begin in repentance, and knowing nothing of worldly reserve or compromise, work by acts of self-denial and sacrifice. "Ye believe not," said Jesus at a later stage, "because ye are not of My sheep." In saving faith there is a

mutual responsiveness like the vibrant accord which makes the Shepherd and His flock into something little less than a common organism. There can be no faith without moral sympathy.

It is needless to say that Jesus did not expect to find all at once a ripe evangelical faith in those whom He recognised as followers ; far less did He look for that full circle of virtues in which the work of faith is justified and crowned. If He had held any such false views He would have brought mortification and fatal discouragement to Himself and His work. He could not so trust in man and make flesh His arm. The saving work of Jesus does not found itself upon some elemental good which underlies human character, and He warned His disciples in their utmost devotion against claiming for themselves any standing other than that of "unprofitable servants." Yet at the same time He needed honest beginnings out of which faith and virtue could at length be produced. He did not mind how vitiated was the substance He took in hand, so that its fibre was not rotted by insincerity and falseness. There must be no defective or unsound moral conditions at the root of discipleship to limit the possibilities of the faith He inspired and cherished. Faith must arise in a stirring of the conscience and a poignant sense of need, or it will not be equal to the things Christ seeks.

The highest susceptibility to this kind of faith was obviously to be found amongst those who had listened to the trumpet-tones of the Baptist. Jesus did find it here and there even in the religious capital, but as a rule the temper of the professional piety prevailing there was unfavourable to its genius ; and the lower grade of faith called forth by His passover signs and

wonders was not such as met His desire or commanded His confidence. He distrusted its promise. Such faith was a mere freak of the religious life. Our Lord set Himself to nurture frail, sickly, and imperfect beginnings, but would have nothing to do with the specious faith in which there was no strain of moral sensibility and affection. The faith of pure credulity was a mere excrescence of the lower life, a misshapen birth, and it would have been idle, and worse than idle, to encourage it. He at least would not cherish a specious sentiment within His kingdom, and He was quite content that it should perish unnoticed and unnamed. In this predominant city-temper the essential quality of the new life was wanting, and such faith was a cruel caricature of that which He had come to create by His ministry of teaching and redeeming love. These men could not be suffered to be patterns and mark the footsteps of faith to them that should hereafter believe.

The pride and avarice of the ruling classes destroyed those dispositions which make the right atmosphere for the growth and fruition of saving faith. Such a Divine faculty could no more flourish there than the lily can bloom and the palm flourish on an ice-floe. Those who chanced to be prosperous, in spite of the humiliations of their fatherland, were quite content with the established order of things and had no desire for disturbing changes that must begin with themselves and might possibly impair their outward fortunes. The existing *régime* was an affront both to their self-respect and their patriotism, but the worldly-minded man felt that he had compensating satisfactions. The temple rites were at least inviolate, the authority of priests and scribes, on questions of

purely domestic and racial interest, was unchallenged, and whatever classes had been impoverished by Roman rule, the ruling classes continued to flourish. They at least were not the people to disquiet themselves and abet dubious change. If the angel who smote the hosts of Sennacherib would rid them of the Romans they might accept the new situation with gratitude, but they did not want a reformer who might upset an order of things under which they enjoyed much prestige with the populace and many emoluments. To let well alone was one of their unspoken maxims. Save for the yoke of the Pagan conqueror they were quite content, and most leaders in civil and religious life found that yoke not ill-padded. They were at ease in their lot, and not seriously dissatisfied with themselves. Pride tempted them to despise and reject this carpenter-prophet from a distant province. The faith that holds fast to a spiritual deliverer could not thrive in such a soil. They were quite averse from the self-renunciation which had marked out the disciples as fit subjects for evangelical faith.

And the humbler classes of this holy city had a confidence in priests and scribes which excluded faith in such a one as Jesus of Nazareth. They were drilled into this trust in their superiors from childhood, and deference to those wielding authority in temple and synagogue they esteemed the fulfilment of righteousness. Bound hand and foot as they were to cliques, rings, and bureaucracies, whatever aching sense they had of sin was soothed by the petty rituals of expiation prescribed by their "betters." They followed well the dense, self-complacent pattern set by the acknowledged leaders. Obedience to a

discredited human direction took the place of all other virtues and made faith impossible. The populace was too servile to believe; for a certain robust independence of character is necessary to genuine faith in Jesus. Where social and ecclesiastical tyrannies are rampant conscience has no room to act, and where conscience does not act the kind of belief Jesus seeks cannot arise.

The reputation for piety attained by the chief people of this famous city blunted their sense of ethical need. The whisper of conscience was drowned by the tuneful buzz of applause, and scribes and Pharisees often came to believe they were quite as excellent in character as the crowd affirmed. They felt like canonised saints as they walked to and fro in the streets, or swept through the temple colonnades and enjoyed an all but complete immunity from inward reproach. He who lives and dies in the odour of a reputed sanctity is always in danger of substituting for the stern witness of the conscience the flatteries of the crowd he sways. By a process of civic imputation the righteousness of a devout city sometimes seems to attach to its leading inhabitants. These Jews had in their keeping institutes of worship and expiation, the virtues of which their countrymen from every part of the world came in unceasing pilgrimages to prove; and men whose homes were set in the very focus of these influences were disinclined to look upon themselves as unshriven. These privileged leaders accounted themselves immaculate by a process of occult assimilation to the temple in which they had a name and a place. Precepts were multiplied and duties infinitesimally subdivided till a self-pleasing

illusion of righteousness had become complete and the sense of guilt was quite benumbed. Instead of making the law and the prophets to hang upon the simple principle of love, they made the entire fabric of religion to rest upon interminable deductions, through which they juggled themselves into the idea that they even exceeded the requirements of Moses. It was surely a mark of the high perfection reached that their rules of life and discipline had become many as the sands of the sea for multitude. These self-complacent formalisms were the high art into which the process of compounding with the conscience had been carried. A barricade of sanctimonious sophistries closed the conscience against such movements and impulses as would have generated the faith Jesus was seeking. When the pride, avarice, and unknown iniquities of the heart are masked by a highly decorated scheme of punctilious piety it is fatal to the soul's moral development. The people in question felt themselves so nearly perfect that, whilst conceding to Jesus those very wonderful powers which He had proved at the Passover, they scarcely allowed the possibility of any grave need in their own religious character and standing to which Jesus could minister. Jesus could not add evangelical elements to this illusive faith of signs because, in their way of viewing things, trust in the grace of another could have little or no scope for exercise in their lives.

This adventitious faith, without a deep moral root at the base of it, left the leading citizens of this favoured centre a crowd of ignoble opportunists. There was no such earnest self-abandonment to Jesus and His claim, no such desire to follow in His

steps as had marked the Galilean fishermen and tax-gatherers. We see this temper of reservation and compromise at its best in Nicodemus. Perhaps his story follows our text almost immediately, because it gives us an example of one whose faith was sign-begotten. He had been led to believe in Jesus as a God-sent teacher, and he believed in Jesus in this elementary relation after a poor, tentative, crepuscular fashion, stumbling for the moment at "the earthly things" in Christ's discourse. We have every reason to hope that he came at last to a more assured faith, for his courage in presence of the cross seemed to show that the night's interview had not been wasted; but at the first he was not prepared to risk name and fortune, counting all things loss for the Lord's sake. Wherever men are softened by luxury, terrorised by deference to contemporary opinion, and intent upon popular influence, sacrifice is difficult and rare. And when, in addition to this, men account themselves conspicuous in privilege, objects of Divine partiality, endowed with birthrights and prerogatives that cannot be alienated, it is hard to tempt them forth upon new religious quests, however holy the guidance. The treasure hid in the field they look upon as their own by a law of immemorial treasure-trove, and resent the suggestion that they must sell all to make the hidden wealth their own. Intellectual curiosity combined with a faint strain of homage was the special sentiment awakened by these signs, and such a sentiment contained no promise of a new life. This mood lacked moral earnestness, and was divorced from courage and adventure, whilst Jesus asked for both. In fact the scribes and Pharisees were religious lotus-eaters, and wanted to spend their

days dreaming in the temple and being greeted in the streets. To impart the truth appropriate to the nourishment of a higher faith to such as these would have been like putting the map of a forgotten gold-mine in some far-off land into the hands of a man showing the first symptoms of sleeping sickness. "Jesus did not trust Himself to them, . . . for He knew what was in man."

The faith Jesus required *must answer in due time to the special work He had been sent to accomplish as the Saviour of the world.* New destinies to be reached through pain slept within His own soul, to whose unfolding an unfolding faith in His followers must correspond. It is not sufficient to believe in a man in one relationship when some other relationship he is shortly to fulfil may profoundly affect our entire life and well-being. If two great empires are upon the verge of war, and a plenipotentiary is sent to arrange a basis of agreement, it is not sufficient to allay our panic when we read in the newspapers that he is a prodigy of learning, a brilliant performer on the violin, and a discoverer in chemistry. We may believe all these things, and have no faith in his power to negotiate a settlement. Is he patient? Can he conciliate and persuade? Has he the art of seeing more than one way out of an apparent *impasse?* Has he the prestige which will make his services as mediator acceptable? Jesus could not be satisfied that men should believe in Him as a prophet accredited by signs only. If faith was to begin and end in the credence given to a cluster of miracles, it would after all have been only a little higher than the kind of faith his fellow-townsmen had in the skill and thoroughness of His handicraft in the days when

He wrought in the shop on the hillside at Nazareth. How could the faith called forth by acts of miraculous power survive the spectacle of Jesus uplifted, a helpless victim, on the cross? That event almost destroyed the faith of Christ's own followers, and even they could not reconcile themselves to the harrowing anomaly till the Spirit led them to recognise that it was for their eternal salvation. A sign-begotten faith without moral accompaniments implied faith in Christ's superhuman skill rather than faith in His gracious, spiritual, unblemished character. These Jews did not even draw the inference of the healed man who was cast out of the synagogue that "God heareth not sinners," for they had neither the glow of personal gratitude nor the sympathy with the hopeless woe-begone men and women Jesus had saved, which quickens moral responsiveness to Jesus. They were cold note-takers of acts that were phenomenal. Faith in the power of Jesus without faith in His character contained within itself no promise or guarantee of after-development. Their belief represented that to which they were driven and nothing more. Faith in the incomparably holy and tender character of Him who was done to death upon the cross was the first step to faith in the great atonement accomplished there, and the disciples were thus prepared for their later and more perfect faith. Faith in Christ's character was necessary as a foundation for the future faith of the Church in His enthronement at the right hand of God and the unending sovereignty of grace. This higher faith is incompatible with the critical temper towards the great object of faith, and the belief of the Jews at Jerusalem detached from the spirit of repentance left them

in a condition of mind which made evangelical development impossible. Twelve months afterwards belief in Jesus as a miracle-worker divorced from a well-grounded faith in His character, degenerated into a blasphemy which made Him an ally of the evil one.

In fulfilling His redemptive counsels and attaching men to Himself Jesus needed to change the character, and *the faith that brought no impulse to the heart and conscience was quite unsuited to such an end.* Faith must be competent to cast out sin or sin will soon either cast out faith or dwarf its functions. The faith of sheer credulity could not operate in the great moral domains of man's being, for it lacked the fitness to move and breathe there. Such belief, apart from the desire for a better life, had as little leavening virtue within the character as the belief of an old Egyptian in one of the court magicians of Pharaoh. The faith which occupies itself in the sphere of the intellect can no more vanquish the passions which work in the other half of man's life than autumn manœuvres in Europe can avail to scatter bands of wild insurgents in Asia, who make murder a religion. The spheres are distinct. To set such a faith to tame the devil in us, and cast out our wild impulses to evil is as imbecile as to set a toy terrier to clear a tiger-jungle. A temper which needs the stimulus of cumulative marvels has nothing in common with the vital principle which arrests corruption and renews the conduct. These astonished observers of signs and wonders had not been stirred to the heart and won. They had no sense of the inwardness of Christ's mission, because it did not answer to those mighty needs which express themselves in repentance, and further unfoldings of His holy secret would have left them at

the same worldly standpoint. The soul within them was not in movement, and the future cross would kill the last pulses of their fluttering faith. . . . Jesus could not undertake the barren task of imparting His redemptive truth to men whose moral faculties were in a state of coma. There must be some pulse of sympathy, some sense of his far-reaching aims, some faint conviction of sin driving them to His holy, helping tenderness, if Jesus is to trust Himself to these spectators of His superhuman power and their faith is to win his faith.

The faith Jesus required must *bring men into living union with Himself*, so that all the virtues of His work may be conveyed to them. Jesus does not give Himself to continuous personal intimacy with men who show no capacity for profiting by the privilege. An ambassador would never impart the cypher of his sovereign to a disloyal subordinate who might use it for selfish or even malicious ends. Such men as these could not be taken into the Great Teacher's confidence. He gave them no clues to the object of His mission because, for the time being, they were not at one with Him, neither indeed could be without a sweeping change. It was impossible for Him to be a Saviour in their sense and on their terms, so He kept them at a distance, treating them with reserve, because of the many things in their temper which divided them from Him. He was content that they should think of Him for awhile as one of the enigmas of the day. There could be no salvation without attachment, and there could be no attachment whilst men thought of Him as a miracle-worker and nothing more. The end of all association with Jesus is not only friendship, but mystic union with an assimila-

tive energy in it, and this mystic union is exalted friendship transferred to the spheres of the spiritual and the unseen. These men were wanting in those primary conditions of feeling necessary, both to friendship and to high communion. Some faint degree of moral congruity is indispensable before there can be the promise of oneness in spirit and destiny. All the closest and the most sacred intimacies of life rest upon character. It is inconceivable that John Howard should choose to live under the same roof with an Indian Thug, that an apostle of humanitarianism should become the comrade of an Ivan the Terrible, and that a passionate seeker of new anesthetics to relieve the human suffering which haunts his imagination should consent to a family alliance with a president over torture-chambers. Men sometimes meet because they have a common interest in art, literature or commerce, but bosom friendships rest upon moral compatibility. Had Jesus given countenance to these superficial admirers it would have shown that moral interests occupied the second place in His thought, and that He could be flattered by a tribute paid to powers that were simply accessories to His mission. Here there was no basis for friendship, and still less for that spiritual fellowship through which the benefits of His work were to be conveyed. The virtues of His person and work could no more be communicated to these worshippers of supernatural force than deposits of gold in some far-off planet discovered through the spectroscope could be brought into the mint of London and get into our currency. There was the widest possible chasm between these men who did not know their own need and Him in whom the

fulness had been made to dwell ; and a one-sided faith with no moral fibre in it could not bridge the chasm.

The work of faith is meant to stretch beyond the narrow personal life of the man who exercises it, and *to commend Jesus Christ as an object of faith to contemporaries and the after-generations.* The belief of these Jews had no such promise of dissemination at its roots. Jesus knew that the unreceptive man who is impressed by feats of power but is impervious to moral change, would discredit His redemptive efficacy to those who might otherwise accept His ministries of help. The Master may be betrayed in various ways, and by none more grievously than by the profession of a homage which does not carry with it a desire to participate in His life. These men were the forerunners of Simon the Sorcerer, and a little better than he only by reason of their superior knowledge. Their one-sided faith would have left them typical scribes, Pharisees, and chief priests to the end. For the sake of the world to which He had been designated as a universal Saviour, Jesus had to protect Himself against the loss of name, influence, spiritual power. Paul obtained mercy that he might become a pattern of God's longsuffering and renewing grace, and not that he might be a standing witness of a dazzling miracle only, and that of course implied the kind of faith which enabled him to receive mercy. Faith must enlist all the forces of the nature from the very beginning if it is to serve the spread of the kingdom by setting before the world the argument of renovated character. To those within whose souls belief had no chance of becoming a dominant force Jesus did not commit Himself and His plans, the mystery of His death, and the secret of His coming victory. To do

so would have been to discredit His own name upon which the Gentiles were to trust for salvation. He would have in the Church He was founding no inoperative forms of faith, no caricature of this sacred gift, no grudging credulous adherence lukewarm towards the sum-total of His aims. Representing as He did the spiritual fortunes of the race, He must have a reasonable hope of co-operation in those to whom He gave His generous confidence. His kingdom would have lacked its strong foundations if He had trusted Himself to those who had no disposition to show their faith by their works.

It is said that the Chinese discovered the magnetic needle centuries before it was known in the Western world. But it was a mere toy. It is suspended in the cart or sedan chair of the mandarin, nominally to show him the way to his duties and back to his home at the close of his term of office. But such a use of it is mere sentiment. They did not surrender themselves to its guidance in their sea-going junks, but continued to hug their own shores for centuries. It never emboldened them to cross seas on missions of discovery, never guided to the conquest of a new continent, never made a single Chinaman rich with the spoils of a far-off commerce. And so with the faith called forth by signs. It is a toy affection, a plaything movement of the mind, an imitation creed without power, never leading to sacrifice, heroic enterprise, holy aggression. For such a faith Jesus has no approval in either the earliest or the latest Christian century.

He who knows what is in man always shows *a gracious confidence to those who, with a sincere and unreserved faith, meet His claims.* There is a faith

which never fails to win Christ's faith. He gives Himself to loyal and contrite disciples, not as though they were in themselves wise and good, but because they are lowly and honest recipients of the mystic influences that save men. And with such safeguards His method of justifying the ungodly through faith alone, is vindicated from any suspicion of the fictitious and the unreal. In His work of redeeming the soul from sin our Lord must at least have solid qualities on which He can rely. Faith is reciprocal, and in saying this we do not tone down the great doctrines of grace. It is easy to find illustrations in common life. Not only must the victim of disease trust his healer, the healer must likewise trust the man to whose recovery he devotes himself. Not only must the men who are engaged in some perilous campaign trust the leader, the leader must likewise trust the men. If there be no recuperative power, no strong hold on life, no temper of hopefulness in the victim of disease, the healer declines the responsibility of a heroic remedy and contents himself with palliatives. And if there be no dogged strength and hearty responsiveness in his men the commander postpones his task till he can get the right material. Whilst Jesus does not at the beginning look for perfect moral soundness in those who commit themselves to His care and an obedience which never falters, there must at the least be humility, thoroughness, active sensibility to all moral claims and issues. Is there a reasonable promise of spiritual recuperation? Has this faith which is looking to Me, its Lord, fibres reaching down into the deep, sacred, underlying principles of man's being? Are there the instincts and solicitations of a new awakening life-dawn? Whenever faith

answers this test, rudimentary, infantile, and incomplete though it may be, it wins His faith ; and when belief lacks these moral qualities He makes no response to it, for "He knows what is in man." What we speak of as the grace of assurance is the inward evidence vouchsafed to us that Jesus approves our effort to rest upon His goodness, and that He commits Himself to us as we resign ourselves to Him. He recognises in us the promise and potency of a life to be spent according to His will.

This severe judgment of nominal believers was not ungracious suspicion. None can be so eager as He to find in the human heart a substance upon which He can work. His decision was based upon the close and accurate interpretation of character. His view of men was wonderfully generous, for in thousands whom we should have passed by He found faith. There were things in men who had been flagrantly evil which called forth His sure hope, for they had self-knowledge and the lowliness of mind that always attends it. It is a sad omen if Jesus will not commit Himself to us, but is as a stranger. When the pitiful, ever-hoping Jesus finds nothing to invite His confidence it is the doom and last condemnation of human character. The faith that lacks moral principles in its central fibre is a thinly veiled spiritual treachery from which he turns aside. Faith is futile unless it be joined with the qualities which take their rise in the awakened conscience and the broken heart.

In a suggestive verse in his Epistle to Timothy, Paul gives the life-history of genuine faith: "The end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned." Faith is the

seed, and love the fruit, but the pure heart and the good conscience must have their place in the scheme of development. The faith which has the least ingredient of either constraint or pretence in it, which has no power to get into the conscience and produce a new order of things, which is ineffectual to cleanse and purify the affections, does not fulfil the commandment, and leaves man a law-breaker on whom wrath abides. The faith which coruscates in one section of the mind only whilst heart and desire and conscience are evil is like a light kindled in a pit of mephitic vapours. The light flickers into darkness, and the gloom which is left is a gloom where death lurks. Jesus allowed within the circle of the twelve one admonitory illustration of a faith that lacked renunciation. Is our faith such as Jesus can accept and approve?

VIII

WORLDLY-WISE AGNOSTICISMS

"The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or from men? And they answered Jesus, and said, We know not."—MATT. xxi. 25–27.

THIS profession of ignorance and bewilderment was a subterfuge to which the chief priests and elders of the people were driven in one of their last encounters with our Lord, as He taught in the temple. On the preceding day He had entered Jerusalem under circumstances which seemed to show that He was putting Himself into the position of the theocratic king sketched by Zechariah the prophet; and in virtue of the office assumed He had cleansed the house of prayer from the traffic and sordidness by which its sacred precincts had been profaned. This daring act, of course, could not be silently passed over by those in authority, if at least they had any care to maintain their influence over the people. Of His own initiative Jesus was setting on foot a revolution, striking ruthlessly at the dividends of these sanctimonious patriots, and that too without offering a penny of compensation. To all intents and purposes he was superseding the

guardians of the temple on their own ground. When the Baptist wanted to promote a reformation he had the good taste to go forth into the deserts and preach, and people could please themselves whether they followed to hear or stayed at home. But the Prophet of Nazareth was usurping control in the stronghold of the priests and refusing them the prerogative of rule in their own house. Was his title to dictate in the temple better than theirs, which had come down through many generations and was now stamped with the endorsement of the Roman conquerors? The new situation created had possibly been discussed overnight, and the deputation that came to ask for His credentials represented a league of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. The question of the religious rightness of the act was left out of view, and these functionaries wished to ride off on a side-issue. The justice and seemliness of the intervention had admitted of little or no dispute, for it met with its response in the speedy submission of the offenders and the approving consciences of the crowd. But the man who corrects religious officials should surely have some other warrant than the inherent rightness of his cause. They are willing to submit, if He will produce His title, but not otherwise. The man who is formally licensed is the only man who is competent to do a right and fitting thing. "By what authority doest Thou these things?"

The great Teacher met question with question, and took these captious functionaries in the net which they had spread. "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or of men?" That put the debate into a nutshell, and the question of John's authority practically determined His own.

We must not look upon this question, so disconcerting to priests and elders, as adroit repartee only, and regard Jesus as the wisdom of God because He came off with flying colours in this dialogue recorded by the evangelists. Jesus was not trying to bluff His opponents with conundrums as Samson tried to take the conceit out of his slow-witted Philistine rivals with riddles. We are in danger of being superficial in our informal comments on this incident, and of applauding the point so well taken as we should praise a smart move on the chess-board. To checkmate this cunning coterie with a quiet sentence implied of course much skill and deep knowledge of the human mind, and we are delighted to see these strutting, pompous men crestfallen. But Jesus is entitled to somewhat higher praise than that accorded to a master in the art of sagacious cross-examination.

It has been said that our Lord's method of teaching was Socratic, which is true with certain reservations. Jesus Himself was Incarnate Truth rather than a Truth-Seeker, and His own first principles were reached by another pathway than that of question and answer. But He did wish to make every man a Socrates to himself and put him on the track by which great religious discoveries became accessible. Whilst He was sometimes a herald and announced good news that was beyond the range of an angel's quest, His more frequent method was to call forth the interests of those about Him in the truth and set them upon right courses of investigation. "Whom say ye that I the Son of Man am?" "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?" The shrewd teacher knows how much better it is that his pupils

should find the answer to the problems which enter into their education rather than be told. Most of us have proved that the things we have been able to find out for ourselves are of vastly higher worth and validity than the things we have memorised from books. It is a mistake for learners, in whatever school, to be furnished with cut-and-dried answers to every question which arises in the course of the mind's training and development. We now and again meet with those who are under the impression that the Bible is what the schoolboy would call a crib—a book compiled of ready-made material and worked-out problems. But the sacred Book does not answer to these preconceptions. It gives us all needful hints of the right methods to be followed, but if it had been written according to such specifications it would not have been made in the best possible way for the quickening and enlightenment of the human race. It is better for us to work out our own problems, because in so doing we take hold of root principles. The conclusions to which we are guided by personal search have a higher sacredness for us and implant themselves more tenaciously in our lives than the conclusions which have been made up and handed over for our use, like a patent medicine with a Government stamp upon it. In fact the judgment for which Jesus prepares the way cannot possibly be made to turn upon second-hand knowledge, and it was a part of His mission to assure men that they could verify the salient truths of salvation for themselves.

The counter-question of Jesus in the Temple did not evade the real issue raised. It was perfectly useless now to point to His own miracles and claim

that they were the Father's witness to His office and character. He had done that in His early ministry, and comparatively few were satisfied by the appeal. Some of these temple disputants had seen His miracles, and all must have heard their widespreading fame. To recapitulate His teaching would have been equally wasted work for, by rumour or immediate hearing, they were sufficiently familiar with that. It was better to take them on their own ground. Their prepossessions were to some extent on the side of the Baptist, for he was a model Jew, keeping the law in its utmost strictness. Indeed motives of policy perhaps rather inclined them to side at the outset with his reformation. But the forerunner saw straight through them and denounced their envenomed guile, as did his greater successor. The issue should be submitted to them in its most elementary form, and if they had the requisite courage they might answer for themselves. The crucial question of the controversy they have challenged is, "How speaks the inward voice?" When reason and conscience have honestly adjudicated upon the claim of the Baptist, that of Jesus Christ cannot longer remain in doubt. The earlier is a test case which must rule the later.

In daring the priests and elders to answer this question Jesus knew there were two things upon which He could count. He was persuaded of the honest reverence of the crowd for the martyred preacher of the deserts. The convictions out of which faith must arise were lodged with the masses, who constituted in part the rudimentary Church which was one day to be the pillar and ground of the faith. The Master deserves to be loved all the more for His trust in the fidelity of the multitude

when left to its own right instincts. He was sure the crowds would be true to the strong man who had preached repentance, whose martyrdom had given new solemnity to his message and a new sacredness to his memory. And whilst He had no wish to make priests and elders parade their worst side, He knew also their temporising, their cowardice and their greed of popularity. Prestige with them was a supreme consideration and they were most unlikely to run the risk of impairing it by belittling the Baptist and detracting from his authority.

The Baptist's ministry had few elements of the marvellous in it, besides that of its singular moral infectiousness. He "did no miracle," and yet a thoughtful and devout Jew could scarcely be in two minds about the Divine significance of his work. His fearless, vehement, and unconquerable love of righteousness stamped him as a messenger of the Most High. He needed no other credentials than his passion for God and the holy law which was so commonly violated, for such passion can only come through direct fellowship with God. A man may be moved with a strong impulse to redress a particular wrong, when that wrong touches his own person or conflicts with the interests of his class. Such a temper is common enough, but its partiality and onesidedness show how human it is in its foundation qualities. The passion for righteousness which is Divinely kindled turns every way in its activities and protests, and transcends class and race limits, like the government of the God from whom it comes. John's zeal was a fire from no earthly altar. His teaching was fresh from the fountain of law, and authoritative as the voice of the Decalogue itself.

And to the crowds waiting upon his word John was able to convey some degree of his own ethical intensity. He replenished the public conscience with fresh convictions, poured new forces into its earliest uprisings, and gave to public opinion a validity it had not possessed for centuries. His vocation was like that of the expert who tunes a huge instrument of complex and manifold parts. He brought to the true pitch of delicacy and penetration the moral sense of rough, medley multitudes, so that upon all questions of essential right it gave an accordant and trustworthy response. His teachings awoke the echoes of ten thousand hearts, and about rocks and desert places, synagogues and temple courts, the highways and byways of the land those echoes still lingered. A man capable of such a mission needed no outward credentials from either civil or ecclesiastical functionaries, and it would have been an insufferable impertinence to require them. His mission from God was clear as the noonday. The question with which Jesus met the chief priests and elders admitted of an easy, immediate, and unfaltering answer. And the testimony of such a man to his greater successor was at least worthy of study.

The chief priests and rulers could not be blind to the fact that belief in the Divine mission of John involved faith in the yet loftier mission of Jesus, for the forerunner had testified to the One who came after him and the presence of some of the Baptist's chief followers in the circle of the twelve was a permanent record of the incident. But his testimony must not be looked upon as an inspiration distinct in kind from his inspiration as a preacher of

righteousness. Those foregleams of Him who was to be the minister of fire-baptisms and who was to gather wheat into His garner, arose from his zeal for holiness and the sense he had of the corruption and backsliding of the race. It was in mourning because of the sin of his kindred and his race that he was made suddenly alive to the near presence of Him who came as a comforter of the contrite. Such a sensitive and preternaturally acute conscience could scarcely fail to recognise the Lamb of God, whose work it was to take away the sin of the world. The element of hope always enters into a true preaching of repentance and, unless repentance contain within itself the faint earnest of salvation, to call men to it is as grim and thankless a task as to ring the passing bell for a condemned felon who is on his way to the scaffold. To denounce sin and point no directing finger towards a new sky-line is a mockery that can only breed remorse and have its end in anarchic recklessness. The Divinely authorised preacher of repentance will always find it a part of his vocation to announce the ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation.

But our Lord's question implies more than an intimation that if priests and scribes accepted the message of the Baptist they could not well set aside his testimony to the Saviour of Israel. The man who enters into John's sense of righteousness will attain John's Messianic faith, for both lie in the same plane, related to each other as starting-point and goal. He who sincerely and implicitly accepts the message which makes ready the way of the Lord needs no further persuasion to welcome the Lord Himself, and a short-sighted and politic worldliness

will no longer tempt him to dispute this holy claim. From the terror and distress produced by the hermit preacher's denunciations there is but one way of escape.

The moralist and the lawgiver are forerunners of Jesus still, and it is by their ministries that His way is made ready. It is substantially the old question of the temple which confronts us in the present day. Are righteousness, reverence, truth, humanity, in their deepest qualities and their final sanctions, from heaven? or are they the products of an evolution in which there is no supreme design or control, arts that have invented themselves for the regulation of society, mere expedients by which men hoodwink and govern each other? If Divine in their origin, the man who is penetrated with the genius of these ideas and who proclaims them in the demonstration of the Spirit, is of God. He shares the Baptist's zeal for the Divine righteousness, and like his pattern will pay heartfelt homage to Him who is raised up in righteousness to be Saviour and King.

But these contentious men had not the courage or the candour to answer the question. They had reconnoitred the ground beforehand and, by a masonic code of winks and whispers, could make each other understand the line of defence it was tactful to take up. Jesus, in the meantime, stands ready to drive home any admission they may make concerning the authority of the Baptist. They were shrewd enough to see that it would be impossible to stop with the first admission, for one step of faith compels another. Faith is an organic whole, made up of sentient and growing parts, and, if no artificial barrier be interposed, will express itself in substan-

tially the same forms. The first affirmation carries an inference they were particularly unwilling to draw. They cannot formulate their belief in the Baptist without feeling an irresistible constraint to believe in Jesus also, for if the one has authority, the other has it, in an ascending degree, to which it is hard to fix limits. The sceptical process must begin at a somewhat early stage, and they must throw over the Baptist and even Moses himself, if they are to be aggressive in their repudiation of Jesus. The agnosticism they thought fit to assume was calculated neutrality, and not the honourable perplexity that sometimes comes of deep and impartial thinking. And the religious problem of our day shapes itself to this precedent of the temple. The whole scheme of Christianity begins with two or three primary admissions, fraught with consequences upon which no halfway arrest can be put. The only consistent course open to priests and rulers in view of what they were scheming to effect was to challenge point-blank the authority of John's mission. "But they feared the people." A wholesome dread of public opinion kept them from dogmatic denial. To have flouted the judgment of the multitude would have driven many waverers to the side of Jesus, and have dug the grave of their power as a party.

In putting this question Jesus proved Himself of matchless insight, qualified to exercise over the race that judgment of which He had spoken in His earlier ministry, and of which He was to speak yet again in presence of the high priest. The tact of His method brought out disclosures of character which anticipate the day when the hidden shall be revealed and our least noble secrets shall be proclaimed upon the

housetops. The veils of self-deception were rudely torn aside from the souls of His adversaries, and henceforth they were compelled, not only to know themselves, but to feel that they were read through and through by another. This just and sagacious challenge served to show how the problem of faith, disencumbered of its accidents, was bound up with the problem of character. These would-be censors of Jesus proved themselves poor soldiers of their faith, and the bystanders came to have a shrewd sense of the situation. They had not grit enough either to affirm or deny. And so the sinister motive which prompted their attack was brought disagreeably home to their own souls, and became matter of common gossip in the city. In this brief half-hour they had been compelled to read themselves and each other as never before, and the onlookers had a new sense of the baseness of their leaders. They were temporisers, had been for years, and would be through that most significant hour of history about to strike. They were proving beforehand that there was no honesty in the charges concocted against Jesus, and, at the same time, were self-convicted of prejudice and bloodguiltiness. The crucifixion was branded as a crime, alone in its enormity, by the controversy that preceded it.

Let us hope the self-knowledge these officials acquired in the temple, at the cost of their prestige, made them ready to receive the fresh offer of mercy that came to them through the lips of the apostles, after the Master's resurrection from the dead, and that these gainsayers were amongst those who were pricked to the heart. If that was not the issue the controversy itself must surely have furnished grounds

for the unanswerable indictment of the judgment-day. Their scrupulous outcry for verification, their makebelieve zeal for constitutional order, their profession of an impartial agnosticism stood out as rank affectations and this pious perplexity showed itself apiece with the common hypocrisy of their daily lives.

It would be unjust to make these agnostics of the temple the types of all the men who, in our own day, find themselves in a state of mental indetermination, when called upon to pronounce for or against the claims of the Christian religion. A few weeks ago one of the most robust moralists of our generation said, "It was absurd to affirm the existence of a God and still more absurd to deny it"—a dictum which seemed to imply that the probabilities were not equal. Men whose ideals of public conduct have in some cases been higher than those current amongst nominal Christians, often refuse to class themselves with either believers or unbelievers, on the ground that God is unknowable. This austere reserve is not without its value as a protest against the temper of dogmatic extravagance in the Church, which lightly assumes that all the subjects of religious thought are ripe for definition and final settlement. There are problems concerning God and His ways which are insoluble in the present life, and which, confronting us perhaps in the life to come, may even then defy our power to comprehend. They were not meant to be made plain to us. There is still a tree of knowledge whose fruit is forbidden to us by the laws and limitations of our finite nature. God would become as one of us, or, indeed, something less, since much in man is unfathomable, if we could know all about Him. It is not the wickedness of unbelief which

compels us to admit this, but the spirit of humility and reverence. Perhaps some men are agnostics because they concentrate their attention upon that which is insoluble in God, and therefore assume that nothing can be known. It is as though a self-opinionated man should pronounce astronomy a fable because he had tried to look at the sun with ailing eyes and had become blind. The man who attempts no answer to the riddle of existence is sometimes hypnotised into an obstinate rigidity by the prejudice of his school, and declines escape from the *impasse* by contemplating less obscure parts of the Divine ways. This attitude of mind which attaches impressive sanctions to morality and refuses to think what may lie behind the veil of nature, cannot continue. It is a form of ethical obscurantism, parallel to the temper which, either inside or outside the Church, discourages theological inquiry, and expresses only the stupor and discouragement of a passing hour.

That attempt to apply the tests of physical science to spiritual things so closely connected with the agnostic temper presupposes that the Universe contains only matter and force, so substituting a prejudgment of the whole case for a demonstration. Not infrequently this unfortunate condition of mind is the effect of a more or less conscious intellectual obstinacy. Every science is sovereign over its own methods, and it is folly for the worker in one field of research to offer his particular equipment to the worker in another. That which is obscure in the beginning may grow luminous as we pass from ascent to ascent of practical duty; but the agnostic often disparages this particular form of experiment. Some mountain-

peaks look inaccessible, viewed from the valley, but when the climber, having passed the moraines and the foothills, plants his feet on the plateau from which the peak springs, he finds a pathway of ascent that did not unfold itself in the first stage of his march. We must reach the solution of the great enigmas of faith by God's appointed pathways, which sometimes disclose themselves a step at a time. If we miss the door at the outset of our quest and neglect the ordained sequences in human thought and character, it is unlikely we shall ever attain the knowledge we seek. The question of faith cannot be settled by pure reason, nor must the science of our spiritual relationships be treated as though it were a department of physics. To adopt this line of controversy in dealing with the credentials of the Christian faith, carries with it a suspicion of intellectual dissimulation. The holy men of old, who speak to us through the Bible, always teach that a message of repentance which quickens the conscience is the condition through which God comes into clear conscious communication with us. The soul must be attuned to the Divine conditions before we can interpret the messages which address themselves to us from the unseen. The introduction of telephones could not have ended the cross-purposes which arose with the confusion of tongues, nor can a Chinaman at one end of an ocean cable and a Papuan of New Guinea at the other make sense of each other's language without a prearranged code.

The ill-fated expedition sent up the Nile some years ago to rescue General Gordon came within sight of his palace at Khartoum, and from an island in the middle of the Nile tried to get into communi-

cation with him by heliograph. But the hero had been done to death some hours before, and there was no one to answer the signals of the relieving forces. There were doubtless natives in the city adepts in the art of sending messages swiftly over hundreds of miles by the beat of the drum and the tom-tom. But the two methods had no relation to each other. God cannot come into correspondence with our consciousness unless we learn His method and fit ourselves to His requirements. The fine moral instrument God has put within us must be adjusted and brought into use if we are to know that He is moving for our deliverance. Some men do not wish to handle religious questions at all, unless they can be solved by the perceptive faculties of the soul; whilst other men are quite unable to specify the kind of evidence that would satisfy their instinct for truth.

But there are also forms of agnosticism in the world which savour of flippancy and affectation, and are warped by moral as well as mental limitations. Young men sometimes fancy that it is a sign of wisdom to be detached, to have an eye for the vacillations of the theological balance, to scrutinise with intermittent headshakes evidence that satisfies the crowd of well-meaning believers. They cannot make up their minds because they have a versatile talent for seeing all round a subject and not one side or angle only. It may even be politic to have no obtrusive convictions. And so the honest, conscientious man, who is submissive to an apparent Fate separating him from the knowledge of God, has less worthy imitators, and his mood of mind is half-consciously counterfeited, with the object of enlisting sympathy or conveying an impression of intellectual

superiority. It surely becomes every man whose attitude of mind towards religious verities is indeterminate to test himself and see if any ambiguous compound enters into his uncertain moods.

This assumption that religious problems are insoluble may either entirely neutralise our convictions or in a greater or less degree dilute them. Is uncertainty welcome to us, and welcome because it harmonises with an ignoble expediency in our moral life? To be in doubt may sometimes serve the conveniences of the hour, as these ancient representatives of the spirit of compromise thought. Perhaps our nominally Christian ethic does not press upon us with such stupendous momentum when we assume that clear ultimate decisions concerning some of those subjects for which our faith is asked seem impossible. Is it not a fact that we now and again say our conviction lacks absoluteness, and all the time we mean we are not quite willing to act? If we allow the edge to be eaten away from our creed, right itself becomes less demonstrably sacred. We have inward reservations upon the subject of Christ's title to kingship, because we do not want to bow to His sceptre, if allegiance is to involve clean separation from the coteries whose opinion rules us. We take refuge in the thought that it is impossible to say what was the precise nature of the spiritual transaction which took place upon the cross; but if the Searcher of hearts were to lay bare our secret, perhaps it would be found that we are holding back from the sharp and sublime law of the Cross, and the atonement as interpreted by the theologian seems to exaggerate moral distinctions. We like to think of the future retribution of sin as an insoluble problem, because defined

views might frenzy our lives with a passion for saving men. A suspended judgment upon this subject fits perfectly into our pleasant theories of life. We are aghast at the chasm between Christianity as Jesus and His apostles taught it and Christianity as it is practised in the present day, and, unless we are to become hypocrites of a yet deeper dye, it seems better to say that these subjects are debatable and do not admit of settlement.

When we adopt a more or less modified form of agnosticism, like these officials of the temple, from motives that have at least a worldly admixture in their groundwork, we cannot tell just where the drift may carry us. It was the men who professed themselves incompetent to settle the simple question of John the Baptist's authority who, within a few hours, had sufficient confidence in their own judgments to crucify Jesus Christ because He had said that He was the Son of God. They had made no serious attempt to understand His statement, but drove it home against Him as a capital indictment without the slightest misgiving. And the agnosticism which is not grave, honourable, and free from the taint of worldly expediency, does that still in new and unsuspected ways. Agnosticism is a philosophy of suspense, and the human mind will never permanently settle down into that which is against all its instincts and solicitations. Men either come back to the spiritualistic interpretation of life or gravitate towards a revolting materialism. "What is more injurious than any crime?" is a question asked in the latest manifesto of modern unbelief. And the answer given is, "Practical sympathy for all the ill-conditioned and the weak—Christianity."

Dogmatic denial is more heroic than agnosticism, and likely perhaps to stimulate a quick, decisive reaction in virtuously constituted natures. It might have been better for these priests and elders to have braved the rage of the crowd by calling the Baptist an impostor and a false prophet, rather than to have shrugged their shoulders and pleaded that the evidence did not warrant a conclusion on either side. At the present time there are men who boldly affirm that morality is a human contrivance, and who deny the eternal distinction between right and wrong. The great lawgivers of the past, if not impostors, were at least self-deceived, and held no commission from heaven. Conscience was one of the odds that lay hidden in the primeval slime. Righteousness, reverence, humanity, are fortuitous fitnesses that have survived in the age-long struggle. The great and holy forces which have freed slaves at a great price, planted the length and breadth of the world with hospitals, created the Christian home and the Christian family sheltered in it, put the backbone into much of our commercial morality, and are struggling to eliminate vice, poverty, bloodshed from human history, grew up out of the little tingle of sensation felt in a speck of structureless jelly millions of years ago, and God has nothing to do with such processes. This audacious presentation of the case is perhaps better than the morbid temper which will neither affirm nor deny. Sharp, loud, drastic contradiction may be healthier than a feigned inability to read the riddle of God and moral obligation. Such theories at least are ugly, uncomfortable things to live with, and sooner or later the mind will sue for a divorce from the repulsive dogmas of denial to which it is bound.

We can, perhaps, settle more questions than we have supposed, if we will consent to revise our methods. The mood of soul needs treatment, as well as the scheme of evidence by which God and God's Son are presented to our reason and our faith. We do not make the best of ourselves when we go about trying to look wise and saying, at the same time, "We cannot tell." Till we hold ourselves ready to answer Christ's questions, we cannot expect Christ to hold Himself ready to answer ours. "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things." Terrible silence of Jesus! To think that He who is the hiding-place of that wisdom which is more precious than rubies, who having dwelt in the bosom of the Father knows, as is vouchsafed to no other, the counsels of His love, should close His lips in a resolute and age-long silence! Whilst refraining from any judgment of others, may we not each ask himself the question, Is not my despair of finding a solution to some of the problems of religion due to the silence of the Lord whose questions I have parried?

Let us be honest, and look at ourselves and our imaginary incapacities for faith through the eyes of Him who searches the deepest things of the heart, and to whom our most intricate and complex motives are clear. Let us cross-examine our own souls as He would cross-examine us if we stood in the place of the priests and elders in the Temple. Our attitude towards His claims will be the subject-matter of His unerring judgment in the great day to which we are hastening. Indeed, is it not so already? for His judgment is unceasing.

IX

BREADTH AND JUDICIAL STRICTNESS

"For he that is not against us is for us."—LUKE ix. 49.
"He that is not with Me is against Me."—LUKE xi. 23.

AT the first glance these two statements seem to run counter to each other, and an impatient reader may be tempted to say the first was spoken in a mood of indulgent tenderness and the second in a mood of pitiless rigour. Here surely the great Teacher comes to the verge of contradicting Himself. But the statements will be found in perfect accord and will command our acceptance if we recall the circumstances under which they were uttered. In the one case Jesus was dealing with an attitude of outward detachment that was not inconsistent with faith and practical co-operation, whilst in the other case He was dealing with a base neutrality which veiled coldness and unconfessed antagonism.

In the story which belongs to the closing months of Christ's ministry the disciples had just forbidden the use of their Master's name to one who had shown genuine confidence in its power by invoking it to cast out devils. The only reason for their veto was that the man had an independent spirit and would not join himself to their company. He may have

been a follower of the martyred Baptist or one who had been stirred to private enterprises of mercy by the widespread fame and teaching of Jesus. In every age there have been ministers of spiritual power who are a law unto themselves and whose history lies outside the recognised successions of prophet and of priest. The twelve had no right to impose their terms upon this rival wonder-worker and make him the butt of their bigotry. Jesus did not ask every disciple to follow Him from place to place and share His earthly fortunes. Some men He expressly sent back to be witnesses of His grace in the circle of their village friends. To enlist recruits, all and sundry, at once into a crusade of Galilean Salvationists would have been a perilous political experiment at this particular juncture of affairs. Moreover, He needed in every community of the land detached allies to do His will and lead the heart of the people back to Himself, after He had been put to an open shame upon the cross. The disciples were not yet filled with the Spirit and had an exaggerated estimate of the value of corporate union with their party. And this proscription of a fellow-labourer had an ugly tinge of jealousy in it, for the stalwart exorcist was doing, with more or less of success, works which they sometimes failed to successfully accomplish. This man had two good things about him: he was a sincere friend of humanity, spending himself after the fashion of Jesus Himself in an endeavour to abate terrible distress; and he had faith in the superhuman efficacy of this despised name. If not a recruit in the camp of the disciples he was at least moving to the same end along parallel lines.

The second incident which took place twelve or eighteen months before is summed up in what looks like a counter proposition. Jesus had just cast out an evil spirit in Capernaum, and the miracle was at once made the text of a fierce and painful controversy. "He had done it," said the Pharisees, "by collusion, for He was a mere devil-worshipper. Herein lay the secret of His art. If He had not sold Himself to the evil one how could He win respite from raging distress for this miserable demoniac?" And there were those standing by—possibly friends and kinsmen of the healed man himself—who could listen to this blasphemy without a word of protest. In the presence of Scribes and Pharisees, some of whom had come down from Jerusalem as official spies, it would be impolitic to commit themselves. Better keep their own counsel for a time and watch the trend of events. Their worldly wisdom was covered up with the glozing profession of an open mind. On the one hand they would not themselves rail at the Divine Healer, and on the other hand it was no duty of theirs to combat the innuendo. But such a policy had upon it the stamp of baseness and infamy. To see a benign and indisputable miracle and then forthwith listen in silence to an insult against the worker was the mark of mean, ignoble, cowardly natures, quite disqualified from sharing in the blessedness of the kingdom. Such neutrality was bad on the ground of morals and religion alike. There are times when the open mind is a crime. The event of which they had just been witnesses should have compelled them to take sides, and we can feel that our Lord's implicit condemnation of their unheroic attitude was not one whit too strong.

They were not waiting for further light or seeking indications of God's guiding hand. Their duty was plain and they shirked it like poltroons. "He that is not with Me is against Me."

The difficulty arises when we treat these words as general axioms, for they seem to neutralise each other. And yet in strict logic they are true, for they do not cover the same ground.

The first proposition asserts that there may be divergent methods, not only without antagonism but which show equal faith in the workers and contribute to the effectual setting up of God's kingdom. Such a declaration is the mark of indulgent breadth in the spirit of Jesus. The second proposition asserts that the absence of specific, articulate sympathy in those who have been brought into contact with Jesus is proof of vague unformulated antagonism. That is a note of the judicial strictness which blends itself with breadth in the spirit of Jesus. Immature sympathy and virulent opposition may each assume, in the world's eye, the form and tone of neutrality. On the one hand, where there is no outward affiliation to the visible fellowship of Jesus, His Spirit may be working in effectual ways, and on the other hand silence, suspense, calculating reticence may cover up the temper and the triumph of the evil one.

I. With a wise and patient breadth our Lord asserts that *outward detachment and spiritual oneness are not inconsonant.* He welcomes as an ally the man who is loyal to Himself, but who moves by an apparently different pathway to the same certain goal. He who heals human woe and does it in Christ's name is helping to bring near the kingdom and is exercising a faith which is the title to spiritual

citizenship. Jesus could never forget that He was Saviour, Friend, and King of all men, and that every devout and honest soul was under redemptive guidance ; and it was this assurance which made Him so tolerant, magnanimous, and longsuffering towards those who were slowly rising into evangelical knowledge. Indeed it was by His indulgent breadth that He affirmed His benign and universal sovereignty, whilst His disciples, in spite of their call, were sectarians, and by their bigotry proved themselves the adherents of a local religion. He was not a spiritual slave-driver nor the captain of an ecclesiastical pressgang that He should endorse their intolerance. Jesus admitted the right of every man to arrive at the truth by his own pathway, and all pathways chosen by sincere seekers after God were consecrated with a guiding presence.

Immaturity of training, as in the case of this misjudged man, may deter from formal discipleship for a time, and such immaturity cannot be instantaneously removed by the word of command from either Peter or John. The man was learning by his own method, and it was a mistake to force the steps of the process. He could not all at once cut himself loose from the associations of the past, many of which might be eminently sacred in his eyes. Fidelity to a martyred leader may have been the motive which bound him to his chosen sphere of service. Perhaps he was one of the type which declines to take ready-made opinions from others, especially from such as squabbled amongst themselves for priorities and premierships and were sometimes discredited in the miraculous tasks to which they applied their gifts. No such parting of the ways was in view

as had been reached by those who were onlookers at the great controversy in Capernaum. If he had been present upon that memorable occasion and had stood midway between Jesus and the blaspheming scribes we are quite sure to which side he would have gone. In the meantime his position had everything to commend it. Perhaps he was not a hearer on the Mount, but his life was instinct with the charity inculcated in the great sermon, for he was seeking to heal those who were oppressed of the devil. If he had not heard the rumours of Peter's confession a few weeks ago he, in his way, had some sense of the superhuman power of Jesus. His theology, as far as it went, was faultless. Whatsoever he attempted was in Christ's name, which implied his sense of the fact that this spiritual Conqueror had bound the strong man armed. And he was in a fair way for learning a great deal more had not the disciples run a grave risk of frustrating his spiritual development by their ill-timed and acrimonious interdict.

The attempt of the disciples to silence this man was *invalidated by their own limitations*, for they themselves were as immature in knowledge and experience as the man they banned. Jesus did not disdain the company of the twelve though painfully alive to their many shortcomings; but He had no hard word for the man who did not feel himself suddenly drawn to their fellowship. In demanding that he should throw in his lot with them they were quite exceeding the terms of their first commission. The Master Himself sometimes required His friends to forsake all and follow Him, but before laying down such terms He knew their

circumstances, could define their vocations and determine the future upon which they were entering. The disciples issued decrees as though they possessed prerogatives coextensive with those of the Master Himself. Our Lord's nearest friends were not filled with the Spirit, and whatever authority they might have in the days to come, they had not at present that authority which is inseparable from the illuminating baptism. It is quite conceivable that this nameless labourer in the cause of humanity may have been repelled by the temper of disciples who used the Master's mandate without possessing that tender spiritual persuasiveness which made the mandate irresistible. The misjudged and unhappy man may have felt that the disciples wanted him as a political recruit, and his views of the spirituality of Christ's mission possibly surpassed theirs. However deep his reverence for the prophet himself, he could not bend himself to become the partisan of a Galilean programme. To conscript him into their league at the present moment might have tended to make him a participator in illusions and infirmities to which he was superior. The disciples, not yet perfect as their Master, were morally unfit to command after this imperial fashion. Their uppermost idea was to assert authority, to magnify their most important office, and they scarcely gave themselves the trouble to remember that in so doing they might thwart this man's growth and paralyse his sacred enterprise. Jesus could not approve such mischievous measures. He saw there were reasons to excuse, if not to justify, this man's isolation, and declares that all such are on the side of the kingdom. The right of a Church to direct rises and falls with its participation in the

spirit of the Master, and the man who keeps himself aloof from a Church which is worldly, compromising, contentious, and corrupt may be one whom Jesus numbers with His allies. The Master passes an approving judgment upon some who are repelled by a blemished discipleship and not so directly identified with its corporate life as might be, and praises all sincere, disinterested, concurrent service.

In some of its aspects the work of this unattached believer was *more evangelical* than that of the men who had been directly commissioned by Jesus Himself. His vocation, like that of all Christians in the after-times, was inward and spiritual, and was not determined by a command addressed to the outward ear. He did not "know Christ after the flesh," and his loyalty was of that higher spiritual order to which the human fascination of the Lord's personality contributed little. Perhaps his was the blessedness of those who had not seen and yet had believed. He was slowly learning, and illustrating with heroic perseverance whilst he learned, faith in a Saviour who transcends the accidents of time and place. He was the kinsman of the disciples of far-off centuries who do their work in the spirit of consecration to a Master whose form has long been veiled from human sight, an early explorer in those great truths of inward experience upon which the Christian Church was by and by to rest. It was neither his lot nor his calling to be a personal companion of Jesus and then to testify as an apostolic eye-witness of the things which he had seen ; but he was anticipating those special types of ministration entrusted to disciples in the last times. To confide in the mystic power of a name and achieve great things was

a higher test of the evangelical character than to forsake boats and nets at the bidding of a form walking by the shore and to preach in Galilee and Judea within call of the Master's voice and under the spell of His eye. He was learning right early the lesson which baffled Peter and John in the eclipse of the Cross and the alphabet of which was taught to two on the way to Emmaus. Like Paul himself he fulfilled a humble apostleship "not of men nor by the will of man." It implied no mean insight of faith to hurl back the mocking malignities of evil in the name of Jesus and to realise that principalities and powers had already been led in triumph by the Galilean who came back from the wilderness, whither the Spirit led Him after His baptism.

The providential crisis which was to separate this man to Christ's cause had not yet come into view, and in their interdict the disciples played the part of the rash, impatient souls reproached by Jesus, whose "time is always ready." The significant hour was bound in due time to strike, but it was no duty of the twelve themselves to hurry the issue. For every human soul a period comes at length when there must be a birth into new spheres of consecrated service, or decline and inevitable death. Private and unattached discipleship leads on at last into avowal and open confession. Jesus had need in His earthly ministry of friends who were not publicly leagued with His followers, and with whom there was perhaps an unspoken understanding. Such an one was the owner of the upper room who had furnished a place for the Passover rites of Jesus and His company. Perhaps it was the dedication of his house to this act of religious hospitality which brought him into

direct and recognised association with Christ's fellowship. The foul wrong done to Jesus made Joseph of Arimathea an adherent and a public confessor. To Nicodemus the solemn turning-point came with the cross, and the ruler of the Jews could no longer withhold his tribute of friendship, without falling into sharp self-condemnation. Probably he missed much by his tardy discipleship, but when the alternative was thrust upon him either to honour Jesus or to be base, he chose the good part. Under the stress and peril of unjust persecution Gamaliel himself openly espoused the side of right. The danger which would have frightened many a man into a runaway called forth heroism in others whose religious development had been tedious and belated. And in ways unknown to us, this spiritual free-lance, this man who went his own gait, but whose heart was with Christ and whose work was a pledge that he could not speak evil of Christ's name, doubtless proved himself a valiant servant of the kingdom. After the separating crisis has once come into view isolation, neutrality, aloofness may assume new aspects and become the gravest misdemeanours.

Faith cannot be summoned by a magician's wand into sudden blossom and instantaneous fruit. Like the Master, we must be patient and remember men are under a guidance we cannot see. We are told by St. Paul that God determined the bounds of men's habitations that they might seek after God, if haply they might find Him. In some parts of our country there are small experimental farms, where painstaking, highly scientific observations are being made that may improve and even revolutionise agriculture. It would be bad political economy to

break up such farms under the plea of enlarging the agricultural area of the country and growing a larger proportion of our food supply at home. God has parcelled out the world into many domains, within which the search after truth must be followed, and it is fatuous to intrude with our impatient mandates when men and women around us are honestly working out the problems to which Providence has set them. We must give honest souls time and be patient with the methods they pursue, if they are sincere and reverent, and perhaps sooner than we think they will be found in outward allegiance to the Lord of the world's wide harvests. Let us keep in view the indulgent breadth which Jesus combined with His judicial severity.

II. Jesus affirms that obstinate *neutrality is inseparable from antagonism.* This of course presupposes that He has already come into men's lives to justify His claim. At the beginning of His ministry, when He stood up a comparative stranger in the synagogues of Galilee and few mighty works had been wrought by His hand, He would scarcely have ventured to lay down this rule for testing men. In early stages of the spiritual history, whilst the conditions for a rational and emphatic choice are not yet complete, a premature decision is never demanded. But as soon as the reasons for an intelligent preference have come into view and stand arrayed before men's eyes, a studied and an obstinate neutrality merits the sharpest reprobation.

The world itself does not count the indeterminate temper a virtue, and sooner or later expects each man to declare himself and take his side on questions that agitate the community. Perhaps it patronises

the trimmer for a time because, when the conflict between right and wrong becomes acute, it can usually count upon his support. It is peculiarly merciless to the man who continues sitting upon the fence, after it has called upon him to come down. And, up to a certain point, the world is perfectly right in demanding that every man shall show his colours. When test questions are pressed home upon us, in our civic or in our imperial life, we are not free to decline the responsibility of forming a judgment and recording it. The man who shirks the duty of making up his mind evades social obligations of binding force and is the victim of a proud, selfish, exaggerated individualism. He practically says, "I will live in a nest of my own, and no one shall drag me out to meddle with my neighbours' nests, or to save them from the spoiler." The world at last loses all patience with the man who will neither co-operate for good or for evil. If for a time it tolerates you as a neutral it has probably discovered that in you which promises support against the kingdom of God when the testing-day comes. The world is built on the rude impulses of the flesh and is fevered with secret animosities against spiritual things. It is not a cool, dispassionate society which can dispense with allies. The man who watches the course of events before declaring his convictions will be swept off his feet when the tide of feeling rises high. Statesmen have set themselves to create neutral states, but history would seem to show that neutral states rarely last and tend to disappear in the vortex of revolution and war. The neutral zone is often the devil's best recruiting ground. He who does not join the ranks of Christ's confessors is driven at last to enrol himself

with the adversaries. The position he has taken up is indefensible. Neutrals are the reservists of the prince of darkness, and rarely fail in answering his call to mobilise.

Continued neutrality is *a sign of moral weakness* and makes ready for the tragic collapse of character at last. In a languid colourless world this irresolute attitude might carry with it no grave omen of disaster. But the world in which we find ourselves is one of fierce moral struggle, and it is as difficult for a man to pass through it without swaying either to the one side or the other as for a tight-rope walker to perform his feat in a storm. A finely posed attitude of non-committal might perhaps be maintained in realms of windless calm, but not in the tempestuous scenes where our lot is cast. The man who takes no sides as between good and evil is anemic, and if one with faint pulse, weak digestion, bloodless body, ventures into a plague or cholera area, the dire result is inevitable. The man incapable of making up his mind is in a condition of disease, and such disease may mean evil to others as well as to himself. The would-be neutral lacks the temper of courage, of sacrifice, of heroic defiance. He who aims at being always neutral will find at last that there is no evil of which he is not capable. Weakness hardens into malignity, and the great crimes of history have been perpetrated by men who could not fling a defiant "No" into the teeth of the world, and who held themselves superior to the weakness of taking sides. Neutrality is the devil's modelling clay, and it is needless to describe the ungodly masterpiece which comes from beneath his hand when he has a plastic material with which to

deal. The Old Testament sketches the curious career of a prophet who tried to play the part of a neutral. Not for a house full of gold and silver would he speak biassed oracles, and yet he wanted to keep on good terms with the king who could bring him to honour. His position as a neutral became impossible, and he died fighting against Israel and Israel's God. When Simon Peter followed Jesus into the palace of the high priest and affected an air of unconcern, he was trying to play the neutral; and he ended his experiment by taking sides against Jesus and bringing dishonour upon His name.

The Messianic hope embodied in the ministry of Jesus was a *standard by which men unconsciously measured themselves and their dominant qualities.* To postpone choice and suspend action at this critical juncture was to show deadness to the message of those prophecies upon which the Jewish mind had been nourished for generations. Good men of the past had desired to see this day and avowed their desire with no uncertain sound. Simon and those who waited for redemption in Israel put themselves in the bodyguard of the Holy Child before he had lisped a word of wisdom or performed a solitary act of power. The intense Messianic expectation revealed character and the slackness of that expectation was the sign of an apathetic conscience and of a temper well disposed perhaps towards a patron God and His complaisant messengers, but adverse to an impartial Judge and a Saviour from sin. Those who desired deliverance from the curse which rested upon the nation, and from the sin which brought the curse, could not fail to welcome the promise brought near

by Jesus Christ. Some things in the methods of Jesus conflicted with traditional ideas of Messiahship, but those enigmas would not of themselves have suppressed faith unless adverse influences had also been at work there. To stand by as a passive observer when he was opening the prison doors to them that were bound was a convincing proof of sympathy with the tyrant who built the prison-house and kept its wasting inmates in "chains of darkness." Reserve of judgment involved not only an absence of vital sympathy with Jesus but a secret recrudescent zeal for the things He came to destroy. If Jesus be indeed a true and an only Saviour from sin, aloofness from His side makes for the triumph of all the evil which is working within us. Deafness to His call and callousness to His love ripen at last into treachery to the great royal Friend of mankind. In the early days of the Indian Mutiny, regiment after regiment was marched out to the parade-ground of one of the northern cities, for the purpose of testing their loyalty and stamping out the smouldering trouble. When the word of command was given and the files of sepoys stood motionless as graven images, this was taken as a proof of disaffection and they were put into fetters. It was not necessary that they should level their muskets at the heads of their officers and redden their hands in the white man's blood to convict them. To stand motionless, sullen, dumb, was enough. Silence to the appeal of Jesus is covert rebellion. The impassive attitude is a sign of the fact that we are drifting to the side of those who crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame.

Under the mask of neutrality Jesus saw *a phase of*

ingratitude that would soon pass into implacable hatred. For many months past He had been strengthening His claim upon the good-will of His contemporaries and proving Himself an unexampled Benefactor of the people. This pusillanimous aloofness was not mere reserve towards a stranger who had done neither good nor evil in their midst. If ever prophet or reformer deserved well of His generation it was He. And His ministry was about to pass into an undreamed-of exploit of sacrifice. That He should die to reinstate men in God's favour puts a hue of indelible blackness upon the indifference some men think fit to show Him. We cannot conceive that the man fallen amongst thieves, and befriended by the one passer-by upon whom he had the least claim, should assume a neutral attitude towards his benefactor and even take part in criticisms upon his character. The sinister reserve which stints praise to a deliverer is bad as a crime. If under such circumstances the heart is incapable of gratitude, it must surely be entirely preoccupied with hatred and ill-will. In every period, as in that of which we are thinking, our Lord's dealings with men deepen in their daily tenderness and generosity, and if we do not become His friends, it is most sure we are irretrievably drifting into a position in which we shall find ourselves His open enemies.

The scenes of persecution upon which Jesus was entering, finding their culmination in the cross, were destined to supply the comment to these words and to verify the judgment they conveyed. The caution displayed by a stranger to Jesus, when His ministry opened, was an entirely different feeling from the neutrality observed by some judicious persons in the

course of this stormy controversy at Capernaum. This later phase of neutrality was akin to the neutrality which spoke its last word in the rising controversy before Pilate's judgment-hall and broke into the cry, "Crucify Him!" Perhaps some who joined in that cry remembered it as a fulfilment of the Master's word. If I pass by on the other side when the life of some man I know is in peril, it is obvious I count that man or his family or his race as a mortal foe, and am willing that he should die. If I pass by a man who is in no danger and whose name I do not even know, such a neutrality does not mean antagonism. To take no side when the name of Jesus is blasphemed, to watch the shame of His cause unmoved, to raise no protest when the clamour for His blood is loud, surely signifies an awful estrangement.

Our life unfolds itself upon a plan that will soon prove aloofness from Jesus to be one and the same thing with antagonism. Crucial events just at hand will show like a dial how our deepest thought stands affected towards the Lord. When the prophecy of the house divided against itself is fulfilled the neutral disappears and the separation is rigidly dual. In "Daniel Deronda" George Eliot describes the unhappiness of two people who had married without love—Grandcourt and Gwendolen. Gwendolen had begun secretly to wish that her cruel and wicked husband was dead, had even felt the temptation to stab him, but they continued to live, as far as an outward observer could see, on decently civil terms with each other. One day, as they were sailing off the coast at Genoa, Grandcourt was swept overboard by the turning of the sail in a sudden gust of wind.

He sank, rose to the surface some little distance from the boat and called to his wife to throw a rope. But Gwendolen stood with the rope of the tiller in her hand, remembered his polite brutality, and neglected to throw it. Again his white face rose above the wave and appealed for help, but no effort did she make to save him. A few hours later she was prostrate with remorse, and Deronda tried to comfort her by saying that her husband had probably been seized with cramp, and even had she thrown the rope the effort would have been unavailing. But such comfort was sophistical and, however much sorrow we may feel, as we read the story, for an ill-used woman, we cannot hide from ourselves the fact that a neglect to use every possible effort had all the qualities of murder. Neutrality was but another name for overmastering vindictiveness. Sooner or later the day arrives pregnant with an event which shows the neutrality of the man who, deaf to the holiest duty, declines definite association with Jesus, is antagonism, keen-edged, atrocious, blood-guilty. If the neglect to act, where there is some palliation for the attitude, brings a remorse which is hard to heal, how much more terrible that remorse which follows a reiterated refusal to take sides with the Man of Sorrows, who has ever borne our burdens and never did us a single unkindness.

But are such issues as Jesus foreshadows possible in these days when we no longer enjoy the personal ministry of Him whom the Jews rejected and slew? Let the question be answered by a further question. Does He who of old took upon Himself our flesh and its burdens still identify Himself with those issues of truth, righteousness, and humanity, which are now

working themselves out upon the earth? Does He love Himself more than those for whom He gave His life-blood? If the service of the sick, the poor, the imprisoned, is the service of Himself, is not indifference to the great causes upon which He has set His seal indifference to Himself? and against that indifference does not the old sentence lie—"He that is not with Me is against Me"?

This vice of indetermination sometimes veils itself in intellectual forms. Our Lord's contemporaries doubtless pleaded in their day that many things in His public teaching were hard to understand, and He Himself construed the office He had come to fulfil in a sense entirely different from theirs. Those who do not wish to pledge themselves either to Jesus or His opponents often show great fertility in criticism. The pros and cons of discipleship multiply at such an alarming rate that it is almost impossible to sum them up and strike a balance. No sooner is one baffling problem out of the way than another equally formidable springs up to take its place. Allegiance to Jesus they assume must be preceded by a final determination of all the questions revolving round His person and teaching. Now, if the Master had made the solution of these problems the gateway to discipleship a neutrality necessitated by the enigmas of faith might be right and just. But the liberty He so patiently permits to the man who is working out his own soul-problems, so long as there is genuine loyalty to the kingdom, shows how groundless is this pretext so often used. Men may be sure of the Master's good-will if they yield their consciences to His control, even though their faith is little more than groping experiment. But there is a fear lest intel-

lectual perplexity should be used as a cloak for irresolution and moral degeneracy. And that fear is often justified by the fact that when the first difficulties which were put forward are alleviated men discover new sets of difficulties to excuse their aloofness from Jesus. They persevere in keeping their doubts open as heroically as the beggar with his sores. When the old problems give out they invent or borrow new. If every controverted topic which keeps men from the Christian profession were settled to-day, other topics would be in possession of the field to-morrow morning and would be used to just the same end. Some men would rather lose half their possessions than have the enigmas of which they make so much settled. They want a decent pretext for keeping aloof from Christ, and this is the most reputable that offers itself. But Christianity is not primarily either a philosophy or a theology, although the neutrality which means antagonism may sometimes plead the enigmas of faith in self-defence.

In the spirit of Jesus we find unlimited breadth and tenderness. He is the patron and defender of liberty, and disclaims the tyrannous sectarianism which sometimes usurps His authority. We may trust His many-sided sympathies. His estimates are generous beyond our petty rules. On the other hand we have to reckon with the judicial severity of his character. Colourless neutrality finds no apology from his lips. We are either on the side of Jesus or on the side of those evil powers which seek to discredit and despoil His work. If we have come to years of discretion it is impossible for us to go on living upon the exact border-line between His kingdom and that of this world. We need a more decided

discipleship. We do not know just where we stand, but we might find out if we would take the trouble to rule about ourselves and our ways a few clean, straight, plain-speaking lines. Unless we confess our Lord before men, how can we be recompensed with His confession before the Father and the holy angels?

X

THE TOUCHSTONE OF DESTINY

"If any man love not the Lord let him be anathema."—1 Cor. xvi. 22.

The Greek word "anathema" means that which is hung up in a temple in token of the fact that it has been devoted to the gods. A corresponding word in the Hebrew is employed to describe the destruction of the Canaanites and their cities, the doom of Achan, the judicial death Saul vowed to inflict on the man who should dare to taste food before his victory over the Philistines had been completed; and the Hebrew word must have coloured Paul's use of the Greek equivalent. That which had once been devoted to God as a tribute to His inexorable righteousness, could not be ransomed by the costliest gift. It must be at His disposal only, and no mitigation of the death-sentence could be allowed. The apostle uses the word in this fearsome historic sense. It is no mere formula of excommunication to which he lends his pen when he takes it in hand to sign his Epistle, for excommunications are pronounced upon persons rather than upon moods of mind and types of character. The Aramaic watchword, "Maranatha," or "The Lord cometh," which follows the anathema,

implies that a righteous king is at the doors to vindicate the verdict. The second advent will in many cases be signalised by unmixed judgment. It must then be manifest that the man who is without any gleam of sympathy for the Lord who died in his stead is devoted to irrevocable destruction.

Paul was accustomed to use strong language, and had not been changed into an affable sentimentalist either by his conversion or his long musings upon "the love which passeth knowledge." His conversion, and the new trains of thought in which it issued, deepened his insight into the principles of judicial righteousness, and he was no less the vehicle of inspiration in these sterner moods than when pouring out his praises of redeeming love. As light implies darkness, so blessing must be contrasted with the curse. Lawgivers and prophets are witnesses to this admonitory dualism, and peal forth threatenings as well as chant evangels. And according to Luke's record both of the Sermon on the Mount and the last temple discourses, the lips of Him who spake as never man spake framed woes to match the beatitudes and scathed Scribes and Pharisees with a fiery tempest. Paul is not violating the analogies of past teaching or allowing the riot of irresponsible vehemence to break forth when he makes this startling anathema the immediate context to his apostolic benediction.

The scope of this indictment is obviously *restricted to those who know something about the life and work of Jesus* and venture to call themselves by His name. The founder of one of the ethical systems of the East once said, "To punish the people before first instructing them is cruelty;" and to that axiom our common instincts at once agree. Paul would have

been the first to apply that principle in the domain of his evangel. This stedfast, impartial lover of the Gentile world would not for a moment dream of allowing his commination to lie against such as were in a condition of ignorance for which they could not be held personally responsible. Nor could the incidence of this mournful verdict rest upon those who received their knowledge of Jesus, such as it was, through mistaken and prejudiced channels. And we may venture upon a further qualification without risk of misinterpreting the apostle's mind. This hot thunderbolt is not specifically hurled at those who might at the moment have defective or unorthodox views of the person and sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. It is a malady of the heart, rather than a distracted and a distorted condition of the intellect, which is banned in the stern sentences closing this Corinthian letter. Of the two Greek words used to denote love, Paul here selects the one which describes not so much reasoned and reverential love, the love which is the highest fruit of well-established character, but rather the impulse of instinctive friendship, such spontaneous leaning towards Jesus Christ as Simon Peter claimed for himself in the days of his shame, when the heaven, opened in sudden revelation, had closed, and the cross had made Jesus all but human again. At the visit to Corinth which had preceded this Epistle, Paul tells us he had preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified, with a concentration and an intenseness more notable than in his common methods of teaching. Whether or not his hearers had risen to adequate views of the rank of the sufferer and of the new principle contributed to God's government of the world by his sacrificial act, Paul did at least

expect the response of personal sympathy to One who was aflame with stupendous spiritual altruism, and for the ransom of His guilty brethren freely surrendered Himself to death. Where there is no answering thrill to this pathetic appeal the heart must be hard indeed and the nature sterile and reprobate. Let there be but the love of friendship to Jesus, blind, undefined, groping it may be, and right views of His work and doctrine will in due time take shape within the mind. That was the order of the process in the first groups of followers who gathered about the Lord. But where there is no appreciation of the sovereign motive and programme of the Cross, no abandonment to the spell of Him who made it His mission to befriend a lost humanity, no gratitude for the pierced hand stretched out to forlorn and alienated souls in help and guidance, the omens of degradation and spiritual doom are grave.

This simple love of friendship upon which Paul so sternly insists was *the determinant germ of faith.* It is not upon a denial of the cardinal articles of the Creed that this solemn anathema is pronounced. Subtle intellectual distinctions may be introduced into the statement of Christian doctrines which do not carry conviction to all minds alike, and the Church has no right to launch against these hesitating souls the curses which attach to moral disobedience only. Faith in its beginnings is the product of the heart rather than the brain, and the man who is instinctively drawn to the Lord as to a friend will not miss the mark. It is a part of God's judicial method of discriminating character that the true Christology should have its root in the affections.

Love mingles with faith and faith with love, and the proportion of love in the completed gift is more than that of rational persuasion. The fuller orthodoxy comes to the soul expanded by the principle of gratitude and devotion to Jesus the Lord. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost," and the revelation arises from the shedding abroad of love within the heart. We are led by love to faith. It is so in common things. You hear perhaps that some one to whom you were greatly attached in your youth has risen to fame, distinction and extraordinary power in some far-off region of the earth, and you believe it at once. It is what you always expected would come to pass. You hear the same thing of some schoolmate towards whom you had the strongest repugnance, and you disbelieve even the newspapers and throw suspicion upon the statement to the end. The Jews could not believe Jesus because they hated Him and went on hating. If we love Jesus with the simple human love of friendship only it makes it easier for us to believe that "God hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name." It is what I would do if I were in the throne of God. For His patience, for His compassion, for His good-will to all He deserves that and even more. Your love rules your faith. The man able to love the Lord Jesus has in himself the pledge of faith, and the man who cannot love Him cannot truly believe and is under condemnation.

These words assume that men are put under *an obligation to love the Lord, which presupposes the cardinal facts of the gospel.* When the apostle addressed the people of Corinth by word and by epistle the visible ministry of the Man of Nazareth

had been closed for nearly a generation, and yet the demand made for love on His behalf was ever being revived and successfully reasserted. This could only come to pass in virtue of three or four great facts which constitute the essence of the new religion: the presence of the Lord in the midst of His followers; the operation of His personal influence upon their spirits; a continuity of redeeming work which entitles Him to the love of succeeding generations; and also the present possibility of conscious fellowship with this Prince of Benefactors, for there can be no complete love without converse and the universal diffusion of that grace which claims the just return of gratitude and devotion. Such words as the apostle uses would be mad and monstrous if any of these facts were lacking from the spheres within which his hearers passed their daily lives. We cannot love a memory or a tradition, however holy, and apart from these truths, which are the staple of apostolic Christianity, Jesus could be nothing more for the best of the Corinthians than a sublime tradition and a second-hand memory. If a Government commissioner in India were to go to one of the famine districts and tell the story of Richard Cobden and John Bright, who abolished the Corn Laws, and gave the toiling masses of England a cheap loaf, and then declare that every poor starveling who would not love the two heroes of the British democracy must fall under a curse, the natives would rightly think such a commissioner insane. The poor Hindoos might justly be asked to love some man who had gone into their midst and continued there month after month to minister to their needs and watch over their stricken homes. The spirit of Jesus was brooding in the skies, and

alighting within the homes of Corinth, doing for contrite sinners there what he had done by his Cross for the sinners at Jerusalem. He was coming nearer and yet nearer to cleanse, to help, to welcome men into His mystic fellowship, or this peremptory claim for love would have been preposterous, exorbitant, unreal. It would be absurd to put me under a curse for failing to love the Pharaoh who built the great pyramid, because he has done absolutely nothing for me and for the people to whom I am attached. The broken fragments of his skin and bone that lie in the mummy wrappings of a museum, awaken little or no sentiment. Unless Jesus still lives and pardons and acts on my side He is a shadow, and I cannot give my heart to shadows.

These words imply that *love to the Lord Jesus, and obedience to the Divine commandment are interchangeable terms.* The anathema alighting under the Mosaic dispensation upon disobedience to a moral code is made to rest under the Christian dispensation upon those states of mind which prompt to transgression. The apostle knew only too well that the mischiefs and disasters vexing the Church at Corinth were caused by dearth of love to the Lord Jesus. The goodness that is inward in its truth, large in its scale, and fulfils the law, is a response to that transcendent perfection in the Master by which our hearts are captivated. This Divine passion is the only force which can prevail against the primeval animalisms of the natural man, and bring release from thraldom. There was party spirit at Corinth of a peculiarly bitter and exclusive type, and such an unhappy condition of things could not have prevailed had Christ's love been dominant in those who professed to be His

followers. Different sets of baptized people ostracised each other, and such petty divisive excommunications would have been impossible to those who had been brought to love the Lord, and to catch His spirit. A genuine friendliness towards Jesus should help us to see the grace which struggles in the crudest disciple. Within the Church itself there was the riot of greed, gluttony, maudlin intemperance, coarsening with odious degradations even the holy supper itself. For some reason or other an incestuous marriage had been connived at. The picture could not well have been darker. But had there been adequate love to the Lord Jesus in the breasts of His followers, these dark moral contaminations could not have spread themselves. To many it would have seemed the more reasonable and impressive course to have put these prevalent misdemeanours one by one under a ban, and to have instituted a new proclamation of the curses once declaimed from Mount Ebal. But Paul, with deeper insight, pronounces one tremendous anathema, which includes the rest—his anathema upon the lack of a spiritual affection, the kindling of which would have saved from every shade and degree of delinquency. His diagnosis is deep and final. And that is true to-day. All defects of personal character may be analysed back into this portentous central defect. A larger effusion of love would cure every moral blemish that cleaves to us. We should overleap the bounds of class, caste, and epoch, and should cleanse our social life from the dishonours that stain it, if we kept Christ's precepts, and we could not help keeping them if we loved Him better. Every reproach attaching to the name of our

country, every cancer that eats its way into our strength, every perilous problem with which posterity will have to deal if we ignobly defer the settlement, may be traced back to disdain of the golden rule, and the golden rule can never be upheld and applied where love to its first preacher is wanting. Every sin of Christendom implies an impoverished love to the Lord Jesus. Our own curse, and the curse of the nation is this—that we have little or no love to the Lord Jesus. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the law to do them." And we can only continue in the law to do as we abide and abound in love to our Redeemer and Friend.

Robert Louis Stevenson is said to have formed his delicate crystalline style by always carrying two books in his pocket, one of which was a Chaucer or a Defoe, a Shelley or a Charles Lamb, and the other a note-book. Whenever he found a passage that excited his special admiration he pulled out the note-book and tried to write something resembling it. Had he not felt the literary instinct within him, and been able to appreciate the intellectual attributes of his masters, there would have been no imitation. The volumes which were his companions would have been left to mildew on an upper shelf, or would have gone the way of the second-hand bookshop. He laughingly speaks of himself as "the sedulous ape," but no ape, however well trained, would have treasured an English Classic, and shown such love to its contents. Intelligent sympathy is the mainspring of imitation. Where there is the love of friendship to Jesus there will be the desire to emulate. We are not likely to do what Jesus bids, and to follow closely in His steps apart from the love we cherish to His person. He is

the only Teacher claiming to be heard by the entire race, on the ground that He has done something for all, which entitles Him to gratitude and love. To love the Lord shows some kind of capacity for the high life He lived, and he who has not that capacity is as much the victim of a curse as the crown-prince who has been born to imbecility and incurable disease. You can tell the kind of man into which a youth will develop, and the place he will fill in his generation if you know the friends with whom he best likes to consort. We give pregnant hints of what is in our secret souls by the way in which we pair off when thrown into each other's company. The attitude of heart we assume towards Jesus Christ will yield an indisputable clue to the potentialities of character. Alas for the man who feels no spell of attraction towards this most wonderful Being! He whose brain may tempt him to scepticism, but whose heart is pure and loyal, will still love Jesus, and wish to copy Him; or at least will be sad because the traditions of his personality do not seem to be sufficiently coherent to command a vivid, devoted service. A man has lost the secret of moral and spiritual progress if he feels no drawing of soul to the prophet-hero of Galilee, who lived as none other ever lived, and died possessed by the thought that He was giving Himself a ransom for all. To love Jesus is to rise towards His own lofty levels, leaving the pettiness and the sin of the past behind. That indeed is the only effectual pathway of moral improvement, and the mainspring is snapped in the soul which is stirred with no gratitude or tenderness towards Jesus. Such a man is unfit for high moral achievements since love to Jesus is the touchstone of destiny.

In the closing words of this Epistle Paul seems to say that right and wrong are questions of personal relationship to the Lord Jesus. Greece had long been the home of philosophy and abstract thought. Morals had often been discussed without any fixed sense of the origin of their sanctions or the extent of their application. Right and wrong had been toyed with as dialectic playthings. The more freely men speculated upon the subject of ethics, the less were they accustomed to perform. They were profoundly occupied with their sophisms, and thus ministered little, fictitious, short-lived satisfactions, to the conscience, as people nowadays often put speculative casuistries for the whole duty of man. When they had thought and talked to the best of their ability, the inclination to do was perhaps more languid than ever. The apostle felt the need there was that a great redeeming personality should inspire exhausted natures with new forces of love. That early condition of things repeats itself. We live in an age of abstract thought, or rather perhaps in an age when a select number of thinkers are enamoured of abstract methods. And such an age brings its insidious temptations. We try to separate right and wrong from the mysteries which invest the origin of the distinction between the two. It is idle to correlate obligation to the supernatural, and we must be content to think of ourselves as ethical automatons. We form new societies for the cultivation of civic virtues which, if necessary, are a grave condemnation of the oldest and most rational ethical society the world has yet known—the Christian Church. We want perhaps a working code of life that does not postulate God and permits a suspended judgment upon Jesus Christ. The

whole attempt is a more or less conscious imposture for our knowledge far exceeds our doing, and is like those South African farms said to measure square miles of untilled ground, whilst only a tiny patch round the homestead is ploughed. Societies to discover and discuss our duties, and to investigate obscure phases of virtue have almost as much reason as societies formed to discover the sun. I have yet to meet the man whose knowledge does not vastly exceed his practical application of it, and the only growth that can come to us is that which must have its beginnings in a nobler and more strenuous fulfilment of the obligations we already feel. There is a marked tendency in the present day to substitute an academic ethical connoisseurship for that hearty personal love which is the spring of all right-doing. Even the Positivist recognises the danger, for he seeks to save himself from a sapless abstract ethic by accepting a calendar, which calls him to the contemplation of a long succession of historic characters. We can only obey that moral teacher who has done something to compel our personal love, and if Jesus fails to win upon us all the moral promise in our souls must be at the point of extinction.

But, it may be argued, if Paul's anathema is relevant to the present hour, another and more serious difficulty looms into view. How can we love one of whose actual existence we are not fully assured and whose personality may have been dissolved, if the evidence of the resurrection does not commend itself to us? In one of his noblest stories Dr. George Macdonald describes a student who is dying of consumption. The poor youth is filled with a pathetic longing to lavish his love upon the Lord

Jesus, if he could only be convinced that the Gospels were perfectly historic and that a risen Saviour would be waiting to greet him beyond the veil. His difficulties were in the sphere of the reason rather than of the affections, and he was waiting for the satisfaction of his critical instincts before making the last venture of faith. In the toils of a tremendous hypothesis he was gasping out his dark and troubled life. Has the character of Jesus been unduly idealised by His admiring disciples? A French writer on the Psychology of the Crowd tells us that all religions are made by the subconscious hallucinations of the multitude. Is it a mere dream-picture of the Primitive Church which is commended to us as the highest object of devotion and love? Jesus lived once, for it is no longer the fashion to deny a nucleus of historic truth in the Gospels ; but was He indeed the gracious, winsome, soul-subduing Being portrayed in those early documents? He perhaps thought Himself immortal, and declared that He should continue to be the Benefactor of His race in coming ages. But was there an enduring substratum in His hope and purpose? Is He alive now, or must we rank Him with the beautiful characters painted by dramatists and fiction-writers? I am not for a moment going to bring Jesus down to the level of the chivalrous heroes and sweet maidens of our Classical romance, but have you not sometimes given to the select characters painted by our great masters in literature a vague worship, closely akin to love? Your enthusiasm for these ideals of purity, sacrifice, holy affection, is no mean test of the qualities that are in you. Taking this low ground, for the purposes of argument, ought you not to feel some little degree of sympathy with Jesus and

acknowledge the justice of St. Paul's method when he makes love to Jesus, a touchstone of character and a clue to after-destiny? There must surely be some hidden twist in the temper if you refuse to cherish with tenderness the memory of this incomparable being. The portrait of a half-nude actress on the walls of one man's room may stamp him as low and depraved in taste, whilst the portrait of a Madonna in his neighbour's house may stamp him as a man of refined and exalted tastes who will adorn the position to which he may be commended. Oh! but the one is a portrait from life and the other is a picture of the imagination, it may be argued. The ideal tests character as truly as the historic, and upon such a basis discriminations which will affect the fortunes of both men may be founded. If we take poor ground and think Christ's character idealised by the Evangelists, yet, if we love the idealised character, it will be some indication of promise, and the unseen Saviour will surely kindle this initial tenderness into holy faith and love; and if we cannot take that ground we must be reprobate indeed. The relevance of these solemn words is not entirely affected by the controversies which may perplex us. "If any man love not the Lord let him be anathema."

The difficulty a Corinthian would have in loving the Lord Jesus must have been greater than yours. In the first place, he had not been privileged with a long training in the school of righteousness and could not feel at first what a supreme Benefactor Jesus must have been in delivering His followers from the stain and burden of sin, at the price of His own life. The singular content of the gospel message, moreover, must have aggravated the prejudice of an

educated Greek. He was asked to believe that a stranger of an uncouth and despised race had been crucified by His fellow-countrymen, thirty years before, and that His name, now preached by aliens of inferior culture, brought redemption to all who would trust in it. The record of this movement in the world, which might perhaps grow into a religion, was brief, consisting for the most part of dismal turmoil and discouragement. But for you Jesus has been justifying Himself through centuries of progress, in spite of apostasies and intermittent reactions, and the life-giving power of His Spirit revives again and again like the indestructible forces of the Spring. If His power seems to fail, it is because we have replaced Him for a time by the idols of our own wantonness and caprice. Jesus the Lord, by the love He inspires, tests what is in men still, and woe to the man who is insusceptible to His drawing.

In the present hour Jesus still justifies the ideal of His character, which has been so long cherished within the Church. The God revealed in His Son has been dealing with you all your days and is still bringing peace and healing to consciences in pain and strength to such as are prostrate with failure. His Spirit broods in His disciples, warming them to gratitude and enthusiasm. Communion with His presence is still possible, for He animates the heart of the world and makes its movements instinct with redeeming forces. A few years ago Professor John Milne, of the Tokio University, was lecturing in London on earthquakes. He told his audience that with the delicate instruments placed in an observatory in the Isle of Wight, he had been able to perceive an earthquake which was taking place in Japan, and the

time at which he fixed it only differed a minute from the time written down by witnesses in Japan. And if the transmission of these movements in the grosser spheres of matter is possible, is it incredible that spiritual movements should register themselves within the consciousness of those who watch and devoutly wait? Jesus still deals with us from the realms of the unseen, and the thrill of His inimitable tenderness and redeeming compassion annihilates not only space but time. "Whom having not seen we love."

XI

OUTFLOWING VIRTUES

"Who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption."—1 Cor. i. 30.

The rise of religion in the soul, with all the beatitudes into which it blooms, is not to be explained by those secondary causes which foster the growth of civilisations and supply motive-power to the ascending stages of advancement in the history of the nations. Wherever the uplifting of the personal character takes place we must look for causes which lie deeper even than those outward systems in which the genius of Christianity expresses itself. Into the nature of every man who springs above worldly levels and attains a sure spiritual experience, God Himself blends the virtues which He first made to dwell in His Son. The new creation, of which all who are in Christ Jesus are the subjects, is built up of elements which are drawn from Christ's fulness. God secretly cultivates into the believing disciple graces which have their first source in Himself and their supreme manifestation in the Incarnate Saviour. Root principles from the mystical life of our Lord are put within us to form the saving qualities of our humanity.

The New Testament teaches that the qualities which flow out from the Lord into believing disciples are spiritual, and gives no colour to the sacramentarian theology which affirms that those qualities are conveyed through the actual flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, as though the diffusive powers of the new life had their circumference as well as their centre in the form He took upon Himself. No trace of such an idea is to be found in the writings of St. Paul. The virtues arising within believing disciples belong to the supersensuous order of things, and it is not by some magic transfusion even of our Lord's glorified flesh that they are conveyed. In the disciple, as in the Master Himself, it is the spirit which illumines and sanctifies the flesh, and not the flesh which quickens the spirit; and all God's gifts of grace are gifts to the spirit, whence they flow forth again to transform the flesh.

The processes of the fact here announced lie beyond the power and province of the reason to test otherwise than by their results. True spiritual life has its beginnings outside the horizon of the natural world, and its tides enter into the channels of human personality from the infinite and the unseen. If the attributes of the new man are in us, they were conveyed by trackless pathways, which we rightly call mystical. By an inscrutable inward activity, the spiritual head of the elect race is made, to those who abide in him, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

To what shall we compare the process through which the virtue which is in Jesus Christ comes down into human consciousness and reappears there in manifold forms? It is like the stream traversing the

mountain-side which under the hand of man becomes light to irradiate the city streets, health to sweeten slums once decimated by plague, power to turn the shafts of mills and factories, a full-breasted current to bear out to river and sea ships which safeguard the coasts or carry our commerce to far-off lands. And so by the act and counsel of God, working through mysterious channels, Jesus Christ becomes all things needful for us—light in darkness, pardon in condemnation, the power of effectual righteousness, equipment for holy service, freedom, immortality. Or Jesus Christ mystically conveyed to His people, like food which becomes movement in the brain, energy in the blood, sagacious and beneficent enterprise in the daily movements is made a vital force within us which assumes many forms and enables us to fill out the plan of God's gracious counsels in our lives.

The salvation to be wrought in us includes the intellect, the conscience, the instincts which impel to the service of God, the sum total of man's complex associations and relationships. Paul's words contemplate man as a disciple in the schools, he needs the word of illuminating wisdom. He is then regarded as a culprit in God's great palace of justice; he needs the sentence of acquittal which shall stamp him as righteous and give him a standing place in the kingdom. He is next dealt with as a worshipper in the temple; he needs the secret of consecration. And lastly, he is regarded as one whose life is cast in a sphere darkened by tyranny and cruel oppression; he needs the grand manumission, the ransom price which will set him free and restore him to his true fatherland. In other words the texts show how

Christ is man's salvation through inward illumination, salvation from the penalty and condemnation under which he is placed, salvation into the moral separateness which befits a priest and minister of the Most High; and also his salvation into a life less mean, sorrowful, and enslaved than that in which for the present he is immured.

I. These words contemplate man as a *seeker after spiritual knowledge*, and imply that the gift of saving wisdom must come to him through redemptive channels. The Divine work in the soul begins with supernatural enlightenment, and till a new sense of God is conveyed to it from Jesus Christ, however sagacious the man may be in his worldly judgments and however richly stored his mind with the learning of the schools, he is but a fool with the doom of folly and frustration waiting upon his steps. No species of the animal world could survive without some dim sense both of the worth of life and of the conditions under which life must be maintained; and man cannot have the life which is life indeed whilst his spiritual senses are locked up or deranged. Wisdom is the gate through which entrance into salvation is gained.

A Chinese writer describes a race of men, mythical of course, who sleep twenty hours in a day and are awake only in the little fraction that remains. The result is that dreams and waking impressions are inverted in their thought and they attach importance to the phantoms of their sleep and look upon the objective realities of life as visions and vapours. One can almost believe that fabulous race has near kinsmen amongst us. There are those who look upon the sense-life, with its

fugitive fashions and images, as solid realities, and who look upon the solid realities of our spiritual relationships as tenuous phantasms unworthy to be reckoned with. The world has little or no sense of the true adjustment and proportion of things, and we are predisposed to guide ourselves by its specious wisdom. We were made for God and eternal things much more than for eating and drinking and hurrying hither and thither upon the stage of the present life, and we are dreamers greatly to be pitied till we begin to share the wisdom of Jesus Christ. The unregenerate man is the victim of a woeful derangement, and lacks a true sense of Divine claims as well as of the sanctions by which those claims press themselves home. Christ's saving work within us demands our intelligent co-operation. In times of disaster and calamity it is often impossible to save dumb animals, because they have not sagacity enough to enter into the situation and respond to the efforts made for their rescue. The work of redemption is not a piece of benign mechanism let down to the earth and warranted to take effect outside the sphere of our personality. The salvation of the gospel begins within us. God can only save us through the wisdom we consent to receive ; and inasmuch as salvation is of Jesus Christ, the wisdom that initiates salvation must be obtained through union with his life.

The first sign of this dawning wisdom is that a man begins to see the evil of sin and the jeopardy into which it brings the soul. He who makes disobedience to God and contempt of His laws an insignificant thing, has no solitary ray of Christ's illuminating knowledge in his thought, any more

than the creature grovelling leagues deep in sea-slime has a sense of the shining of the stars. Christ was the wisdom of God for this, amongst other reasons — He realised as no one had ever before realised the suffering brought by sin upon all continuing in it. The fanatics are not those who cry out with fear because of transgression and the disaster inherent in it, but those who treat it as a comedy and confront the long-delayed judgment upon it with careless and intrepid mien. Christ is not made unto us wisdom till we loathe sin with His intense and holy loathing and account it the chief peril of the universe.

This wisdom brings us into sympathy with the Divine method of salvation through the Cross. Without this primary evangelical gift a man cannot enter upon the second step in the apostle's conception of the Divine life and become righteous through a conscious participation in the benefits of Christ's work. The wisdom of this world, to which the Cross is foolishness, makes pleasure the object of quest, and wherever its maxims are accepted men are confirmed in selfishness and in the same proportion made incredulous of that sacrificial love to which the Cross is a witness. To all selfishness, to the philosophy which fails to take account of man's estrangement from God and its dire effects, to such as make the pursuit of pleasure the chief end of life, the preaching of the great and awful passion through which peace comes, must always be a discord. The world has no sense of sin; in other words, it lacks all the finer ethical appreciations and the doctrine of atonement seems as superfluous as an ambulance brigade in a millennium of worldwide peace. When the sense of

sin awakens, the doctrine of vicarious sacrifice has won the day, and is no longer a question of controversy. The work of Jesus must be seen through His own gift of wisdom, and theories we design and construct for ourselves fail to help us. This first endowment illuminates the pathway into salvation.

But the place of this Divine wisdom in the new life does not cease when it has proved itself our guiding star across the threshold. Having led us into the faith of Jesus and interpreted His gracious offices to the soul, it abides to instruct us in God's will and to counsel us in those acts of practical righteousness, inspiration for which we have found in the free forgiveness of our sin. The gift of righteousness received through our fellowship with the Lord can only be maintained by companionship with the indwelling wisdom which prescribes the methods of its application. This first-born grace is also a necessary element in that sanctification to which the believer is constrained by the inbrooding spirit of Jesus, for there can be no holiness in ignorance and mental midnight. The light in which holiness finds its highest emblem implies both knowledge and love. Wisdom is the inbreathed art-gift of the new life which shapes the character into beauty and subtle spiritual fitness. It aids and directs the rare processes which consummate themselves in the sanctification of the man who is in union with Jesus Christ. It illuminates the sphere in which every form of acceptable service is rendered. Perhaps we should be less frequently disloyal to the great informing principles which are implanted within us, and attain a more evident and effectual Christ-likeness, if we remembered that the light which

shows what is highest and best to do in our daily lives is not a faculty of natural discernment, nor yet the product of a Divine fiat within us only, but a specific emanation from the spirit of Jesus Christ.

And this wisdom, which at first begets fear and sore distress, becomes at last a spring of unfaltering assurance within us, as in obedience to its promptings we inwardly accept the early and the later gifts of the all-sufficient Saviour. The painful groping of the past is replaced by a confidence strong and immovable. This wisdom from above brings the calm which is beyond all earthly clouds into the soul, dissolving all the fears and misgivings which vexed the life as it was lived apart from Christ. And this wisdom abides as an inward spring of light when redemption is crowned, a source of those unfolding visions of God which shall fill up the immortal life. "Made unto us wisdom."

II. The second term of the text looks at the human soul as *fitted by the grace conveyed through Christ Jesus to face the bar of the Divine judgment.* We are culprits needing to be put right with a law transcendently sacred, but broken and dishonoured. Our moral sense must be satisfied as well as our craving for wisdom, and, in view of many a page in our history, that seems impossible. The Divine wisdom which imparts itself to us is insufficient unless it be attended by other gifts. It is not much more than the lamp on the physician's carriage which shows the way to scenes where help is needed, but unless the lamp herald knowledge, resource, capability, it is a cruel illusion. Clear discernment of spiritual problems may bring us a step nearer to the great ends we are set to pursue, and yet by itself it is but

a step. No measure of understanding can repair that which is deranged or replace that which is destroyed in character, and however noble the speculations which employ our powers, the intellect can never be satisfied apart from the rectification of the conscience with which it is allied. There is a tendency to call men good who have stimulated the thought, good feeling, and culture of the world, and we sometimes hear great poets and philosophers, whose lives were cankered with unscrupulous sensuality, spoken of as good because of their rare contributions to literature. But genius wedded to transgression writes its own condemnation, and its very glory shows all the weltering deeps of guilt and shame. The insight of men like Goethe, Shelley, Burns, puts a darker brand upon those unhappy lapses from virtue and temperance which seriously invalidated the worth of their lives. Man needs more than the gift of wisdom in his dealings with the all-encircling God who is pressing him on every side and seeking to bring him into conformity with the just, reasonable laws of heaven. The salvation halts till Jesus is made to us inward righteousness.

Paul's view of the Atonement, as a foundation for God's method of making us righteous, is sometimes described as forensic, and certain schools of modern theology try to remove this specific colouring from their doctrines. It is said that the Pauline thought was outside the scheme of salvation laid down by Jesus Himself. The Epistle to the Romans is sneered at as though it were a medley of redemption and red tape. We do not get the highest conceptions of righteousness, it is said, when we present it in the similitudes furnished by the law courts. We should

cease to think of God as our Judge, bound by the law He administers, and think of Him as our Father. But in primitive conditions of society the father is judge in his own household, and is quite as much bound to administer there the unwritten law as the judge who is surrounded with all the outward pomp of an Assize. The claim of righteousness is the same whether we think of it as enforced by a patriarch in a tent upon his own children or as represented by a judge surrounded with all the pomp and circumstance of a great State or Empire. In all stages and conditions of society righteousness is everywhere present either in solution or crystallised into a machinery for the execution of justice, and we do not escape its requirements by making the idea of Divine Fatherhood supreme. The sword of justice is equally sharp whether wielded by the hand of a patriarch over his own children or by the representative of a Cæsar, and, under any or every condition, an offender needs to be put right with the law he has dishonoured.

The Divine commandment is too sacred, august, reasonable in all its applications to human life for transgression to be treated as a trifle. That we have not escaped the reproach of the past is sufficiently proved by the fact that it continues to vitiate the present and to menace the future, and cannot do otherwise till put away by some new manifestation of grace and power. God never forgets unatoned-for and unrepented sin, and never permits us to forget it for long together. We are told that in one of the lands of the East more than half the crimes committed are confessed to the judges and magistrates, and but for the interposition of relatives the rest would be confessed likewise, and that, too, in a race

where the conscience is not thought to be abnormally active. Such is the instinctive need of the human heart to be right with law. Whilst God buries in benign oblivion the iniquities of the contrite, He looks with unsleeping displeasure upon those who cloak their misdoings and regard breaches of Divine percepts as less grave than offences against the statutes of the realm. One isolated virtue cannot be palmed off for the group of which it should form a part, in those spheres where the Divine equity rules. A plague-stricken ship is not fitted for entering port by having its hull painted or one only of its decks disinfected. The rehabilitation must be thorough and far-reaching. It is of no avail to plead the virtues displayed in the relationships of home and leave out of account the relationships wherein we come into contact with God ; nor, on the other hand, will our temple pieties be acceptable substitutes for the virtues necessary in the world of commerce and citizenship. God's law is two-sided, and in each part claims obedience as a basis of personal righteousness. No more fearful lot can await a man than to be adjudged lacking in presence of the law which binds itself upon his conscience. Better be branded by every judicature under the sun than be stamped with indelible blame in the courts of heaven. To be without righteousness is the most tragic privation that can befall a man. Till authoritatively put right with God's law, we are like escaped convicts hiding amidst the mists of Dartmoor, stealing disguises, foraging like wild beasts, living a hunted life and always feeling the pursuers are near by, even when no trace of their presence can be seen. God's bar is coextensive with our lives, wider than the earth,

immense as the everlasting ages, and we are always in presence of the living law we have defied. The obligation God has put upon us invests the whole of our life and there is no escape from its meshes.

How can this oft-repeated default, of which every man is sensible into whom a gleam of Divine wisdom comes, be met? Can we be put right with this all-encircling, sleepless law, and be kept right? Only through Him "who was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." He speaks in us as we stand at the judgment-bar of the Most High, pleading His sacrifice as the ground of our forgiveness. He makes Himself our sponsor, engaging to impart the life and power of His own righteousness, so that through His inward help we may come to love righteousness and hate iniquity after His own Divine pattern. The process of making us righteous is not completed in a mere sentence of acquittal. Grace conveyed through Christ's sacrifice to the heart and the conscience makes men devoted to that righteousness of love through which they are saved. The Cross which cancels condemnation becomes thereby the inspiration of a consistent and many-sided obedience to the vindicated law. The Divine process which leads us to trust in the sacrifice of love makes its innermost virtues seminal within us, and the Crucified at last lives in us in all the power of His righteousness. "Who of God is made unto us . . . righteousness."

III. The apostle's next word, "sanctification," takes us from the court of justice to the holy place of the temple where *as chosen and separated priests we consecrate ourselves to God.* Our obligations do not end with keeping a law of righteousness, for

the pardon of sin restores us to personal relations with a holy God, to whose will we are thenceforth surrendered. At each succeeding step of the ascent into our spiritual destiny the wisdom and righteousness inwardly conveyed by the spirit of Jesus must attend us. The holy service to which grace constrains is reasonable and needs a gift of wisdom to interpret its claims and its methods. Holiness is never divorced from light. The love which produces unblemished sanctity of spirit and life is informed with that unerring sense of fitness which was in Christ Jesus. Uninstructed love may prove erratic, capricious, fibreless, sentimental. It must be directed and strengthened by a gift of discernment conveyed to us from our Lord. And in the realisation of that sanctity which fits us for access to God righteousness is no less necessary than wisdom. Whilst the grace which makes righteous through the forgiveness of sin brings the dawn of holiness into the soul and the two blessings are intimately linked, yet there is an order in their mutual relation that cannot be reversed. The brand of moral criminality must be wiped out from our lives, and we must be in fixed accord with the Divine law before we can surrender ourselves as instruments of holiness unto God. In the Middle Ages notorious offenders against the law were often allowed sanctuary within minsters and monasteries, where they escaped the vengeance of kings and magistrates by taking upon themselves the vows of religious orders. A similar usage still prevails in the East. A few years ago the native cashier of an English bank embezzled a large proportion of the capital, and made off to a Buddhist monastery amongst

the hills, two hundred miles away. The law of extradition was never called into play for his arrest and punishment, and two or three years afterwards he died there a member of the confraternity he had joined. But the genius of our religion does not permit us to compound for the past by dedicating ourselves to holy and sacred tasks. The court must acquit us, and we must be established in the ways of righteousness before we can pass from the judgment-bar to the temple and separate ourselves to God after the pattern of chosen priests.

In what sense is Christ Jesus made unto us "sanctification"? The process, like the preceding processes of which it is the fruition, is inward. Holiness is love and outsoars righteousness in its grandeur; for into righteousness an element of fear enters, and this all-dominating love is kindled by the soul-absolving love of the indwelling Lord. This motive-power of the new life in Christ Jesus is the secret of true consecration, the force which strengthens weak and wavering wills, the gracious constraint which presses the soul into constant surrender to the will and work of the Father. When the heart is open to all the operations of His presence, we find ourselves effectually moved by the spirit of His self-consecration to the service of the race, and become thereby priests and ministers of the sanctuary. We cannot be in contact with Him, always receiving of His blood-bought gifts without catching His very life-breath. It is by the Holy Spirit that He comes to dwell within us, but His work prepares a permanent home within our hearts for that Holy Spirit through whom we are sanctified to God. The ministry of the Spirit which makes ready a race of spotless

priests to stand in the sanctuary of God's presence flows from the work of Jesus Christ. He is our sanctification, although the Spirit immediately dispenses the grace which consummates character.

How prone we are to think of that purity of heart which fits us to see God's face and to serve Him in perfect love as though it were to be attained in our own strength, after years of failure and disheartenment. It is just as much the gift of grace as the pardon of sin, and we are as helpless to possess ourselves of the one thing as of the other. True, it is imparted to us in the process of struggle, and the struggle is our best preparation to receive the gift. Let us think of the sanctification to which we are called as conveyed to us from the Father through Christ Jesus by the mystic agency of the Spirit. He is made unto us "sanctification." The virtues necessary to our spiritual completeness are bestowed upon us by the same sure, unfailing, but inscrutable process. This is the highest gift coming down to men from the Father of lights—a gift and not an achievement, and the pathway of its descent is through the Son.

IV. The last comprehensive word of the text "redemption" reminds us that through the same ministry of inward grace *we are brought at length from the house of bondage* into a kingdom where the labour and bitterness of the past are forgotten. The order of the apostle's thought is from the inward to the outward, from the centre of the soul to a vast circumference of rest and blessedness. For that glorious life of liberty into whose fulness we are one day to come the earlier gifts make ready. This term "redemption" is

broader than its associated terms, including on the one side that pouring out of the Incarnate life upon the cross in which salvation begins, and on the other release from the last infirmity of the flesh with the wiping away of all earthly tears in which salvation is crowned. And here again the preceding gifts in the series have their continued part and place. The value of emancipation depends in no slight degree upon the extent to which the bondsman, who is the subject of it, has been trained for a nobler lot than that in which he has hitherto fretted himself. How can men enter into the privileges and opportunities of the higher state made ready for them unless a gift of wisdom awaits bestowment and the heart is open to receive it? How can men in their foolishness and transgression find compatible companionship with the free spirits communing together in God's presence? It is a waste of bounty to redeem the slave unless he can be put on the side of law and order, for he would simply exchange the bondage of the field for the durance of the prison. There is no place for the rebel against morals in the ideal kingdom—the kingdom of heaven. An established and a law-abiding character is the qualification for enfranchisement in the city of God. The past debt must be cancelled, for it is useless setting men free if they are crushed by the irredeemable obligations of the past. An act of emancipation does not uplift those for whom it is promulgated unless those instincts of devotion, which are the flower and perfection of all life, are awakened and satisfied. The world towards which our Deliverer leads the way is one of sanctity, and we cannot fit ourselves to its demands unless we catch the spirit of our

Master's consecration to the will and work of His Father.

How is Jesus Christ made to those who receive Him effectual and perfected redemption? Having shed abroad within their hearts the spirit of His wisdom, righteousness, and unspotted sanctity, He fills them also with that fulness of power which dwells in His resurrection-life. Through the power of His indwelling presence they triumph over death even as He and pass thenceforth into those unsuffering regions of light over which He wields the sceptre. It is through the ever-active virtue of His personality that this complex life, in the undivided sum of its capacities, is liberated into the larger conditions for which it cries. The uplifting impulse, which brings the believer at last into a state from which sorrow and sighing flee away, comes from Him no less than the first gleam of spiritual wisdom which enables us to discern spiritual verities and adjust ourselves to their laws. He is made unto us redemption.

When the children of Israel were in captivity they were loosed at length from their bonds and restored to the land of their fathers because of the favour two or three of their kinsmen found at the Medo-Persian court. The virtue and loyalty, the zeal and large-heartedness of Ezra and Nehemiah won the exiles favour in the eyes of kings, who judged that a race which produced such men was fit to be free. These saints and patriots who represented them at court and became their sponsors were made unto the captive tribes redemption from the house of bondage. And the merits of our Divine Kinsman and Representative determine our destiny in the same way. Through

the incomparable offering of love presented upon the cross and through the patience, the tenderness, and the plighted help of His priesthood He is made unto us redemption ; and at last we find escape from the painful degradation of this captivity and win entrance into the fatherland of light. Do not let us limit the work of Christ by assuming that when we have been once forgiven we must make good our citizenship in the kingdom of light through the inherent force of personal character. He is made unto us "redemption." The wisdom which fits us for the companionships of a new society, the righteousness which makes bold in the presence of God, the consecrated service which realises the sacred idea of our origin, and all the suffrages of the exalted life in heaven, are the gift of Jesus, and if united to Him we already sit in the heavenlies.

The association of graces in this familiar text seems to imply that not only are they interwoven by a service of mutual helpfulness into the new life, but that the root-principle of their communication is one and the same. They stand upon the same footing, are bestowed upon the same terms, and the last is given just as freely and surely as the first. They are fashioned out of one primordial element, and obey one all-infolding law, like orbs in the same constellation. Well-knit links in a chain which reaches on into eternity, no power can dissever the series. One grace as surely brings another in its train as spring ushers in the summer, and summer makes ready for autumn ingatherings. Wisdom is the harbinger of righteousness, righteousness is the forerunner of sanctification, and sanctification brings in its train that complete redemption for which we

wait; and between the members of this celestial group there is solidarity and mutual sponsorship. The earliest gift of the Saviour to the believing heart attests His fidelity and resourcefulness, and is an earnest of the final enrichment. It speaks of the virtues which dwell in the great Head for the help and the healing of His many members. It is a great thing to know from personal experience that a channel for the inflow of grace is opened between us and our Lord. A sense of relief is felt when the first faint syllable finds its way across the cable which had been cut by an enemy. It is cheering to hear in times of disaster that a pilot-engine has crept across ploughed-up railway line and broken viaduct, and that communication is reopened. The fuller messages and the heavier freights will come by and by, and your expectation is not in vain. It is something to receive that beginning of wisdom which shows itself in the fear of the Lord, something to feel that dawn of rest within the soul which is the token of forgiveness, something to find ourselves moved by the spirit of consecration to God. Such inward visitations prove the open pathway, and these elements of grace are a pledge of inconceivable blessing yet to come. Such experiences show also that the power of acceptance and assimilation is awakening within us. Our natures are not insusceptible to the influences issuing from that redeeming Presence which broods in our hearts. If so much of His saving virtue can reach us, we shall yet know the glorious fulness which flows into the new creation from His exalted humanity. The affinities with Christ Jesus which sleep within us assert themselves, and all things are possible.

We are often tempted to resent the theology which inculcates dependence for power and spiritual life upon One who has long since passed out of view, and whose mystical presence is declared by the unbelieving world to be a romance of the devout imagination. But to the untaught mind the facts of the natural life are just as startling. Our earth, with all its inhabitants, is interwoven in destiny with orbs far off from its own immediate orbit. To-day have we not seen each other and held mutual converse in virtue of influences which have travelled from an orb ninety-five millions of miles away and have permeated every pore of our bodies? Our simplest act is a product of solar energy. And if help comes from such distant realms to drive these human mechanisms, and make us capable of the most elementary acts, surely it is not incredible that help from beyond the horizon of our sensuous life should enter into us, so that we may be qualified for the momentous, all-essential acts of the spiritual life.

Are not these processes of an inward redemption necessary to uphold the equity of the Divine government of mankind? Not a few evil qualities steal into our characters from the outside world. It is said that we have an animal ancestry, if we go far back enough to find it, and that the taint is not quite obliterated from the best of us. It is, perhaps, a more obvious fact that in our suspicion and irritability, our inclination to choose and pursue wrong paths, our coarse, ill-restrained impulsiveness, we possess a sinister legacy from bygone generations of which it is not easy to disburden ourselves. And in addition to this, the frailties of

our contemporaries convey themselves into our moods and dispositions. The corruptions of the bad man enervate when they do not specifically infect his neighbours. And if these insidious poison streams percolate into our lives, surely unseen currents of sweetness and healing may have access likewise. God cannot wish to abandon us to those inward forces which make for evil, and to keep everything which makes for good out of our lives. He who is "made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," by His abounding grace adjusts the tragic derangement, and vindicates the supremacy of holiness and love in the Divine government of the world.

XII

ATONEMENT AND THE CONSCIENCE

"Gifts and sacrifices that cannot, as touching the conscience, make the worshipper perfect."—HEB. ix. 9 (R.V.).

OUR knowledge of primitive religions is not sufficiently advanced to warrant precise and final statements upon the origin of sacrifice, but in the worship of all races ideas of expiation mingled with ideas of festal fellowship. The natural inference is that expiation is the basis and groundwork of fellowship, and must come first in the order of development; and against this inference no valid objection has hitherto been urged. These ethnic systems of sacrifice were not without their uses, for they kept the conscience from complete stupor, and acknowledged a moral debt which was pressing upon the worshipper. They were better than the philosophies of moral stupefaction, which in a later age treated sin as a trifle in an evanescent life and scoffed at every effort to expiate it. All systems of sacrifice ministered some degree of satisfaction without entirely deadening the conscience, as did Judaism itself with higher authority and more notable results.

The sacrifices appointed by Moses were selected

from sacrifices current throughout the Gentile world, and stamped with a fuller expression of that expiatory idea which was fast fading from them. His work not only looked forward to the perfected faith of the future, but was intended to rescue true elements in the religion of the past from that hopeless degeneration to which they were hastening. The Levitical system which began to grow up under his authority applied palliative rather than radical remedies to the chronic distress of human nature. The ministries of the tabernacle rendered a service analogous to that which we now describe as "first aid" to the injured. The offerings and sacrifices presented by the priest upon the altar assuaged pain, inspired hope, bound up wounds that for the time could not be completely healed, and prepared the spiritual sufferer at last for the touch of infinite skill and lovingkindness. But these gifts and offerings could not make "the worshipper perfect, as touching the conscience."

The limited value of the Jewish ritual was asserted from the very beginning in two significant ways. The sacrifices presented upon the altar needed daily renewal. The smoke ascending from amidst the temple towers never ceased. The robed priests were always moving noiselessly about the altar. From day to day, from feast to feast, from year to year, the stream of worshippers seeking peace passed in and out of the courts, and the same faces came again and again. Remedies are put aside when the recovery is complete. The Jew would not have continued to come from Egypt and Italy and Persia to the temple if he could have found perfect healing for an aching conscience in one pilgrimage to the

shrine of his God. The most impressive sacrifice of the year, which seemed to recapitulate the virtue of all the daily sacrifices, did not open the way for the congregation, nor indeed for the great body of the priests, into the most holy place. The thick veil concealing the inner mysteries was a witness to the limitations of the system, and the man with a half-healed conscience felt the fitness of the separating veil. If the moral sense of the worshipper had been entirely rehabilitated, and invested with irresistible ascendency over the life, he would not have been shut out from the glory of that inner sanctuary into which the high priest passed once a year. The ritual which prescribed sacrifice acknowledged its own limitations by this humiliating enactment. The healing was like the cases we sometimes see in countries where surgical science is crude—a healing which delivers from death but entails lifelong deformity and inconvenience.

Now when this writer tells us that the Levitical gifts and sacrifices could not make the worshipper perfect as touching the conscience, he is drawing a contrast between the Old and the New, and he implies that what was beyond the power of the old ritual has been accomplished through the one sacrifice offered by Jesus Christ.

The great problem of all ethical religions is to take away the pain of the human conscience without deadening its functions. And that is accomplished by Christianity, which has for its centre the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first condition of a religion which saves men is that *it must not deaden the function of the conscience.* The teacher of what is called a purely natural ethic

says to the penitent, "Make a new start and let the past take care of itself. Bygone errors must be allowed to sleep in silence, whilst you turn your steps to better things." The two parts of the message cancel each other, since the future cannot be better than the past if the conscience is forbidden to occupy itself with the wrong already done. Such counsel is suicidal, for it seeks to benumb the functions of an active conscience rather than to stimulate and restore. The method of dealing with sin prescribed by some of our teachers bears a close analogy to the repudiation of State debts advocated by unscrupulous revolutionists, and is closely allied to it in morals. A State rarely repudiates its debts, not only because an entire loss of credit follows such a transaction, but the sense of integrity in its own citizens is thereby imperilled, if not destroyed. It would end in the victory of every base passion, and the suppression of all virtue if every evil man had the power of calling for an act of indemnity in his own favour whenever his circumstances might require it. The place of conscience in human life is destroyed if we are free to say at any period suiting our pleasure or convenience, we will make a new start, and as to the sins of the past we will no longer trouble about them. The issues with which our moral sense concerns itself are predominant in their importance, and the moral sense is stultified and attenuated by all systems which make sin of little or no significance in human life. If the Lord Chief Justice were sent round the country to inflict five-shilling fines for technical breaches of bye-laws, his office would be degraded, and he himself would count for nothing in our national history. He might as well be put at once on the same list as the

King's falconer or head bargeman. If our wrong-doing brings with it no abiding guilt and disability and may be well laughed away, the moral sense is dethroned and becomes the most abject of our faculties. If neither restitution nor sacrifice is necessary for the removal of sin, the distinction between right and wrong is erased, and that inward voice which asserts the distinction may be despised. The Christian religion offers men the forgiveness of sin only under conditions which fully safeguard the conscience. The past must be reckoned with or this central power in human life will be discredited and overthrown. The moral sense is not the kind of organ which can be removed by skilful surgery without fatal results to the character. No system which soothes and stupefies the conscience by making sin a harmless and temporary aberration to be forgotten as soon as possible, can save and perfect its adherents.

To deal with sin by the remedy of inadequate restitution without vicarious sacrifice, is scarcely less disastrous in its effects upon the conscience. If a man thinks that he can in any sense undo the past and deliver himself from the toils of its misdoings, he is already the victim of a self-complacency which is fatal to acute moral sensibility. The Jewish system itself, in spite of its superhuman authority, was demoralising to the worshipper who looked upon its expiations as final, rather than as symbols of a Divine redemption yet to be made known. The fulfilment of the ritual conditions was to a great extent within his own power. He could buy the victim at a cost which was not ruinous, and he could lead it into the temple courts. But the market price of an offering from the stall or the field could not be

put into the scale against a moral wrong without debasing the standard of character. If the blood of bulls and goats could indeed take away sin, sin was not the portentous offence assumed by the prophets and lawgivers of the past, and the testimony of the conscience itself was exaggerated and untrustworthy. It was this idea, that offences could be redeemed by fines, which led the prophets in the days of the Jewish decadence to inveigh so strongly against the later developments and interpretations of the Levitical ritual. He whose throne was established from old within the conscience was dishonoured by the prevailing belief that a trespass was sufficiently dealt with when an inferior life had been placed upon the altar. And even when those practical counsels of amendment and restitution preached by the prophets had been heartily fulfilled the problem of sin was not solved, and superhuman grace had to deal with the predominant factor in it. God had to reserve to Himself its complete expiation to save the sinner from that self-complacency which always deadens the function of the conscience. If a man assumes that he can undo his own sin and make good its ill-effects to all who may have suffered from it, he will go on sinning without compunction just as long as he feels inclined.

The moral sense suffers deterioration the moment the idea becomes fixed within us that out of our own poor, finite resources we can satisfy either God or man for the wrong of the past. The power of miracle is a trifle compared to that with which we credit ourselves when we assume that we can in due time pay our own debts to the dishonoured laws that are always pursuing our footsteps. It would be most

mischievous to tell a youth that, as he was the heir to hundreds of thousands and possibly millions of pounds sterling, out of this ample fortune he would one day be able to make good any wrongs into which he had fallen; for every reckless and self-indulgent act he would, by and by, be able to compensate in princely figures. If a lad gets the idea that he can undo evil by money payments, and that his resources are all but unlimited, he will never learn justice, wisdom, self-restraint, to the end of his days. In fact he will grow proud of the indemnities he has paid without depriving himself of a single luxury. And those schools of thought which teach a man he can expiate his own errors, and by his abundant future virtues make good the lapses of the past, utter that which debauches the conscience and destroys the soul. If we assume to ourselves the power and prerogative of self-redemption, we shall feel that we are above God's law, and the faculty within us which interprets and enforces that law will wither away and perish. No system can save a man which does not magnify the work of the conscience and attach supreme importance to its intimations.

But are there not schools of religious thought which reject the doctrine of a vicarious atonement for sin and yet allow and affirm that it is impossible to overestimate the evil of sin? Every man must bear his own wrong-doing, is their message; and the burden is often terrible. The expiation may be incalculably long and agonising, extending possibly beyond the term of this earthly life. Such systems surely do not tend to deaden the function of the conscience? No, but they fail to fulfil the second condition, for they bring no release from pain. The sting within it

must be removed, and that could not be perfectly accomplished under the Old Covenant.

The religion which perfects the conscience *must set free from pain and bring to it healing and unbroken rest.* No sense or organ of the physical life can reach its right development if pressed by conditions which irritate and distress. The racking agony must be alleviated before progress can begin. The child whose life is one long, inward torture can scarcely hope to be a giant. It will be a wonder if he survive at all. It is the province of both physical and moral pain to localise any hurtful influence at work in body or soul and thus make healing possible, and inattention is disastrous. The effect of long-continued pain is to constrict or disable the organ in which it throbs, and to dwarf the entire stature. The child to whose ear every sound is an affliction will never be a musician, for he feels no pleasure in the fine discrimination of notes. The sufferer from chronic inflammation of the optic nerve can never win fame by the use of the engraver's needle, the microscope, or the study of the heavens. The cripple whose every step is an ordeal can scarcely hope to be an athlete or explorer. If great excellence is to be achieved there must be distinct pleasure in the exercise of a natural sense or endowment. And the character, of which conscience is the germ-cell, can never reach excellence, symmetry, strength, and distinguished grace unless the pain within the conscience is taken away. If some insect gnaws at the seed out of which the manhood springs the manhood itself will be blighted, and greatness, sympathy, abounding courage, and resourcefulness of character will be impossible. Every instructor of the young and every employer of labour knows that where

something is weighing upon the conscience there will be such listlessness and inattention that good work cannot be done, or if there is for the moment a feverish energy which is intended to produce forgetfulness, recklessness and reaction are sure to follow. The living God cannot be served aright unless the conscience is cleansed and healed of all the distresses of the past. The sunshine stimulates respiration, and men only half live in the night-time and on dark and cloudy days. The glooms of condemnation must pass from the conscience, and the sunshine of God's favour shine clear and unclouded if the soul is to expand into its true grandeur. The diseased, self-tormenting moral sense must be healed or a man cannot rise to the full measure of his own capacity and do his providential work.

To sound the note of alarm and compel us to halt when danger threatens is not the only function of the nervous system. Its senses are the gateways through which all the gladness of the outward world conveys itself to us and adds to our joy in living. And the sensibility which takes its rise in conscience and like a fine nervous tissue invests all our faculties and all our movements is meant, not only to admonish us when we go astray and put ourselves in danger, but to minister the blessedness of God to our spirits. A joy distils itself through a healed and an approving conscience, more ethereal in its quality not only than that which is conveyed through healthy natural senses, but even than the higher joy ministered by the affections. It is only when the hurt of the conscience is healed by the Cross that the conscience is perfected and the highest joy of living is felt.

But can the offering of the Cross really perfect the

conscience by the removal of its misery and secret distress? Does not the mere idea of salvation through the vicarious suffering of another constitute a fresh offence to the rightly ordered conscience? It is obvious that the satisfaction of the conscience through the work of Jesus Christ is not the same in quality and character as it would have been our blessedness to experience if we had never sinned at all. The peace brought to the erring spirit by the ministry of redemption necessarily leaves room for much regret at the past to mingle with gratitude to the Deliverer. Finding ourselves as we do in a state of sin, partly through our own acts and partly through the acts of others, this is the best, and indeed the only solution of the dark problem which faces us. The future must be as the past and new causes of inward moral pain arise unless a Divine physician appear to heal this inward pain.

The man who allows no place for the vicarious principle in dealing with the dark enigmas of the religious life is a theological individualist of the most extreme and impracticable type. In the home, in the community, in the kingdom and in the empire, pure individualism is suicide; and it is just as impracticable in the realm where the soul meets its Maker and Judge. In every sane working theory of either the natural or the spiritual life the personal and the vicarious principles must interact in reasonable agreement.

May one bear another's burden? Yes, if the other is too weak to bear it himself, and the world in which their lot is cast is one of sympathy and not of selfishness. Is the principle legitimate in one sphere of interests and not in another? Is the bowed body to

have the benefit of this law but not the spirit crushed with condemnation and self-reproach? If a friend may take upon himself my care, may not a yet holier friend be permitted to carry my guilt—should he ask to be entrusted with the task? If we share with each other the common pains of life, may not One who has come down from heaven for our help endure with us and for us the legal pain alighting upon us for wrong-doing? Yes, if personal responsibility is not thereby destroyed and the great act of mercy provide for our after-accord with the broken law. The burden-bearing accomplished in the work of Christ, with all the ministries which flow from it, is intended so to help man through the tragic crisis of his history that he will be able at last to bear again his own burden.

Did He who made atonement for us upon the cross do it of His own free will? for the conscience is revolted at the idea of accepting the benefits of an enforced substitution. Yes, it was an act of love, and the acts of love are always free. In the simple narratives of the Evangelists this feature is brought into strong relief—that other pathways than that which led to the cross might have been chosen, and for some mysterious reason He again and again stedfastly set His face towards the scenes of the Passion and resolutely refused to turn aside.

Is the Sufferer so related to us that we can accept at His hands the benefits of this tremendous sacrifice? There are many gifts we receive without compunction from those who are of our own flesh and blood that we should scruple to accept from strangers. He is our Brother, and, before offering Himself to God for us, was made like unto His brethren in all things. In fact the affinity is so close that there was something

of Himself in every one of us from the beginning that He must needs redeem from shame and degradation.

Does He account the issues of this unexampled sacrifice an adequate recompense for His Cross and Passion? Yes; for He acquires the right to rule those who look for salvation through His work, and thereby enlists all their powers in a new loyalty to that law of righteousness which once pronounced their condemnation. The way of the Cross was the only way by which men could be enabled to fulfil the obligations of the law in their after-lives, and His zeal for righteousness was thereby satisfied. His Cross put a keener grief for sin into all hearts open to its message. If He had the sense of triumphant consummation when the end of His awful self-surrender came we may well dismiss our scruples and allow the troubled conscience to be pacified and perfected by His atoning work.

When sin is forgiven through the sacrifice of the Cross conscience recovers its sense of power and the despair of the past is replaced by new hopefulness because it gains a new ally in the affections. No love and no gratitude are too great to be lavished upon Him who has ministered healing to a mind tormented by evil memories. The Divine Healer is welcomed as indwelling Lord, and His absolute word, far from being resented, is eagerly obeyed. A higher law is accepted than the law of elementary limitations which once bound itself upon the moral instincts. The Cross, in the process of giving rest, imprints new ideals upon the soul and imparts power to fulfil those ideals. Man's capacity for ethical discriminations ranges through wider realms, character attains a more consummate finish, and devotion no

longer stops at selfish interpretations of the mere letter of the law and thenceforth asks how much ought to be done and not how little. The affections which hitherto were often acting against the conscience, array themselves on its side, and thus is the believer made perfect as touching the conscience. This new inspiration is of grace, and of grace alone, and whilst creating an approving conscience effectually guards against that self-boasting which always tends to moral shrinkage and atrophy.

If the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is required for the perfecting of the conscience it is likewise necessary to satisfy the Divine righteousness, for this highest of all our faculties is the "receiver" to which the judgments of God's throne convey themselves. It vibrates with messages of eternal equity. A cynical French writer has said that "man's conscience is the private watch he sets to the time of the country in which he happens to live." It is true men sometimes try to pass off their ignoble expediencies as the dictates of conscience, and inasmuch as conscience depends, to some extent, in the practical application of its intimations upon the dim and ill-trained faculties with which it is allied, men often deceive themselves. The scoffing epigram applies only to a spurious and a counterfeit conscience. This sacred faculty may be more fitly compared with a chronometer set to astronomical time, and God Himself keeps the key which gives access to the marvellous instrument. In its original adjustment, it is an organ of the Divine justice, and to disturb and finally destroy the adjustment is no easy task. Its intimations are unerring, when we are willing to interpret them. And this mysterious sense within us is only satisfied when sin is forgiven

through an atonement which invests the act with the sanction of law ; and the Divine righteousness which is its vitalising principle asks what the conscience asks. There is a strong tendency in modern thought to omit righteousness from the interpretation of Christ's death and make that central event a pure, uncompounded expression of love. If such a theory be correct the Atonement has nothing to do with the perfecting of the conscience, but addresses itself only to the affections. As a matter of fact, the appeal to the affections has power and validity only so far as the Cross first of all addresses itself to the conscience. We accept the reconciliation wrought out for us, and are at rest because, in mysterious ways, it has satisfied the claim of the holy and perfect law.

That we should need to be saved by a vicarious sacrifice, and draw our strength for right-doing from the love inspired by its memories, is of course humbling to our pride. We would rather be saved by our own toil and tribulation ; and this preference explains the leaning of some in our midst towards religions which teach the possibility of self-expiation, after long terms of time. Perhaps it is our self-respect which is offended by the doctrine of the Cross rather than our sense of equity. If we could repair our own trespasses we should feel ourselves in the end at quits with the law once broken and should scarcely be in the mood to welcome any extension of its range. So prone are we to Pharisaic estimates of ourselves and our heroic capabilities, that I sometimes think if no Divine Redeemer had come into the world, God would have had to save us through the virtues of our friends and neighbours rather than through our own. If personal reparation is impos-

sible, we must accept the mediation which is offered rather than allow a law approved by the conscience to go for ever unhonoured and unfulfilled. The thought that you are saved by the interposition of another rather than by your own act will put a keener edge upon your grief for sin and prepare you for the fulfilment of nobler precepts than those of natural morality. Dead to the law and wedded to Christ, a life of sublime promise will open out before you that would have been impossible on the lower plane. The loftiest types of moral greatness begins with the acquittal, for Jesu's sake, of the soul that has been made bitterly sensible of its own guilt.

One of the princes of contemporary literature has given his readers a picture of inexorable law so severe and heartrending that it haunts the imagination for years. The scene is a bleak and all but treeless plain, from which the black concave cloud of night is just lifting at the horizon "like the lid of a pot." The young victim, attended by her husband from whom she had been separated by a most unhappy fate, is closely pursued by the messengers of law. In the darkness of the night the fugitives have stumbled upon the stone circles of Stonehenge. She begs to sleep for a time, and, covered by an overcoat, lays herself down upon an oblong stone, once forming the altar on which prehistoric sacrifices were offered in that rude, mysterious temple. In the reckoning of those officers of the law who are closing in like death shadows in the morning dusk the altar is no sanctuary. The writer probably intends us to regard this girl for whom he has enlisted our sympathy as a victim to the cruel caprice of the immortals, although, technically, she has been guilty of a capital crime. One

feature only relieves the horror of the situation. Comforted by the companionship of her recovered husband, she sleeps with a comparatively easy conscience, for gods and men seem to have conspired against her happiness and virtue, and the justice to which she surrenders herself has an earthly hardness and miscalculation in it, akin to the other sinister influences of her life. If one may be allowed to modify that eerie picture and put new interpretations into some of its features, may it not stand for the helplessness and the hopelessness of the transgressor crouching in old-world scenes of worship and sacrifice? The dishonoured law presses on every side. He is a forlorn figure in the dark, pitiless environment of altars whose sacrifices are forgotten and which offer no sanctuary, the impersonation of despair transfixed in stern, grey scenes, reminiscent of ghostly and vanished priesthoods, no longer able to promise sympathy or salvation. A stern righteousness, which takes no note of the changes of the centuries cries out against us. "The gifts and sacrifices" of the departed past "cannot as touching the conscience make the worshipper perfect." But the better dispensation is ushered in and the end is not merciless. God shuts up all men in sin that He may have mercy upon all. "Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. . . . And having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience."

XIII

DEGREES IN SALVATION

"Who is the Saviour of all men, especially of them that believe."—1 Tim. iv. 10.

Some good men tell us the gospel is a "witness to the nations" rather than the appointed means for the salvation of the race, and they preach it in the tough temper of the soldier who leads a forlorn hope. The issue may be doubtful, but their sense of duty is unflinching. They are sent to prepare a way for the coming of the King and do not concern themselves with results, which may well be left in God's hands. Whilst discharging the tasks of their appointed ministry with diligence and exemplary fidelity, they are never bold enough to dream that they will have any place in bringing the millennium near. Perhaps that may be brought to pass by the personal reign. Such a theory of evangelism is fit for slaves, and of itself could scarcely put the halo of grandeur upon the toils and sacrifices of an apostle. If his missionary work had been based upon such a dispiriting interpretation of God's purposes, Paul himself would have been impossible. He could not have made himself the messenger of

a particular redemption only, for it would have savoured too much of the close, cliquish atmosphere of his early Pharisaism. The man who makes Paul his pattern must see the largeness of God's plans and participate in His lofty and inspiring counsels of grace to the world. In the context the apostle tells us it was hope which animated his life of struggle and obloquy, and hope not merely to look soon upon the face of the King, but to see likewise the brightening destiny of the races of which that King had been crowned a universal Saviour. This preacher to the Gentiles foresaw apostasies, and upon a limited scale had already saddening experiences of the mischief they were to produce; but he was ever hoping in God, and hoping in God who was presented to his faith from two standpoints, as the Saviour of all, and pre-eminently as the Saviour of those who believe. If He was the Saviour of all, each surely had a right to know the good news; and if He was in some yet more notable sense the Saviour of those that believe, men everywhere ought to have an opportunity of hearing that message through which faith was called forth in the human heart. The preaching of the gospel glorifies the Divine character upon an unexampled scale and glorifies it with exceeding splendour in those who through the habit of trust are brought to know the illimitable and abiding realities of salvation.

Now we need this great truth as well as the qualifying truth with which it is paired. If we give undue emphasis to the idea of a particular redemption we shall feel, in going forth to publish the good news of salvation, that we are identified with a project of uncertain issue; and if we believe in a redemption

the promiscuous universality of which swallows up all the distinctions of personal grace, the chief motive to zeal will be taken away, since the preaching which creates faith cannot be considered a vital factor in the ultimate well-being of mankind. Pure and unconditional universalism suppresses zeal, and a rigid, unsympathetic particularism stifles hope. These two truths must be harmonised with each other and be made to co-operate in maintaining the spirit of a sincere and hearty evangel.

Paul here affirms that the foundation laid by God's own thought and act is wide as the world and enduring as time, but he suggests that the final structure may possibly not be commensurate with the foundation. There is a salvation which is illimitable in its range and includes the entire race of man, and there is a salvation of peculiar efficacy and blessedness, experienced only by those who believe, a number which the most indulgent judgment will scarcely allow us to make coextensive with the great aggregate of all kindreds and peoples and tongues. It is the misfortune of some not to believe, and it is the sin of others, and in each case there is privation; but it would affront the justice of God to assume that the privation in the one case is as fatal as in the other.

God is entitled to this name of universal Saviour by *those gracious dispositions which are the essence of His character* and the informing principles of His government. His good-will is absolutely catholic, and in itself knows nothing of terms, qualifications, or points of arrest. Whatever obstruction the intractable facts of human history may oppose to the full working out of His redemptive counsels

those obstructions have no direct originating cause or occasion within His own character. Whether the finally saved be a handful or the finally lost be a handful, God is equally entitled to praise for His all-comprehending counsels of love. In spite of the enormous, cumulative wickedness He foresees, towards the unholiest outcast from the vast human family He cherishes a saving intention which is sincere, unreserved, intense with the strength of an infinite life. There is in every man, near the surface or more remote from sight, the same vitiated strain, in John the Apostle and Barabbas the robber, in Fletcher of Madely and the latest monster of the *Police Gazette;* and if a heart upsurging with a beneficence gigantic, diffusive, irrepressible could be closed at all, the things which might alienate the pity of Jesus from the worst would seal His heart also against the best. His compassion is not governed by complacency. In a greater or less degree ours is. The partialities and discriminations which we admit into our judgments have no place in Christ's thoughts. Our leniency towards a wrong-doer is called out by those veins of redeeming virtue that once and again have cropped to the surface in the course of his misguided life. The outflowings of infinite grace cannot be channelled into the tracks of our petty maxims, for if a distinction is made at all it is in favour of the one who is most foully and miserably disordered by sin. There is no inherency or personal royalty-rights in the virtues which adorn us, and whatever good seems to belong to us by natural temperament has been put there before we awoke to consciousness as a part of the process which saves us, just as the children's festive gifts are placed

within their reach before they awake from slumber. He who admits and even foments fierce, defiling passions within his own soul in whom refining and redeeming influence is at zero, and below that, has had as warm a place in God's heart and as large a space in His good-will as the disciple who most frankly opens his nature to the forces of redemption and is transfigured thereby. The logic of events will in due time compel the irretrievably lost to confess that they have reached the dire end through no defect of good-will in Jesus Christ.

The all-enfolding immensity of the redemptive work was its master-charm for the great Saviour who took its burdens upon His soul. The prophets make this an article of the Covenant established by Jehovah with His Son. In modern days we have been led to look upon the inconceivable proportions of the universe as a sign of the scope of the Creative thought and power. From the Observatory a message comes to us that our earth is a mean, pale orb, all but lost in the splendid crowd—perhaps, after all, a one-sided inference. God does not mean us at least to think of Him as a little Being engaged upon parochial schemes. And the mystery of redemption has its corresponding scales and magnitudes. The sacrifice of Him whom we adore as the only-begotten Son seems less perplexing to our reason when we contemplate the outspreading and interminable benedictions it seeks to express and to fulfil. It was for no meagre moiety or attenuated residue of the race that this precious life was offered, and a universal effect is the fitting tribute to its inconceivable sacredness.

This large-souled interpreter of the Divine love is

not satisfied to confine the intention of the sacrifice which obtains salvation to the scenes of human history only. He speaks of it as stretching into unknown circles of life and reconciling all things to God, whether they be in heaven or on earth. And if the effect of this supreme event reaches to dim and mysterious realms beyond our ken, Jesus must surely be the Saviour of that undivided race whose flesh He had come expressly to bear. Whatever arrest man, in the exercise of his awful freedom, may himself put upon this wonderful work of redemption, there can certainly be no predetermined restraint in the heart of the great Lord who hates nothing that He has made. If in the end of all things He can assert Himself as a Universal Saviour, He will, for all this is eternally rooted in His heart. The punishment of sin, and especially of that crucial sin in which the light and liberty of the gospel are wilfully rejected, may be inevitable ; but God at least is entitled to the glory of His fervent, all-embracing compassions. His beneficence is as grand and demands as loud a tribute of praise as though every print of sin had been effaced from the universe, the smart of former punishment had vanished from the memory of the race, and hell itself become a dissipated and a forgotten terror. No difference of opinion is possible here. " He is the Saviour of all men."

But throughout the appointed days of grace *God in Christ fulfils towards all men an actual ministry of salvation.* He does not, like some of us, ask to be judged by the generous will rather than by the costly deed. This salvation it is true must take effect in a domain ruled by inviolable moral order, but so far as that order permits one life to bring its forces into

play to uplift and befriend a weaker life, He does His uttermost for our redemption, and that without ceasing. The range of such service is bounded by the law of personal responsibility and in other ways, but we do not drift beyond its last term till the scenes of earth have faded in the dimness of death. The part of Jesus in the work of human salvation is dominant, incalculable, all-besetting. His mediating influence suffuses itself through the heart of the Father, for its deep beginnings were conceived there. The spiritual forces of His pitiful personality convey themselves along all the channels of the Divine government. For every man His vicarious death holds back the imminent penalties of an oft-dishonoured law. Through His infinite grace all children are brought into a state of salvation and are numbered in the kingdom of heaven. Evil struggles in the soul of a child with good but all the instincts of a child predispose him to the faith which works salvation. A child will sometimes continue to cruel and unworthy parents a pathetic and tenacious confidence that has been ill-requited in the past, showing how a child is inwardly prepared to fulfil the conditions of salvation. There are grim and terrible scenes in some parts of God's universe, but no place can be found there for a child's hell. Since manhood is reached through stages of infancy and childhood, in which the blessings of redemption are an unconscious or a half-conscious possession, is not God the Saviour of all? Jesus Christ comes between our birth-sin with the sin engendered by it also, and the death to which it tends, making a day of grace and salvation for us. As the strong, heroic guide bears up the companions who have slipped upon the ice and are

half over the gulf, so the mighty Saviour of the race sustains us in life and keeps us from dropping into the abyss. But if the salvation is to be confirmed, completed, and made an everlasting salvation, world without end, we must accept His counsels and learn to co-operate with His method for rescuing us from impending ruin. He cannot go on treating us as mere dead-weight for ever. He stands between the race and the doom it has challenged. He establishes a truce, an amnesty, a duly ratified, temporary reconciliation, that each man by an act of faith may make an age-enduring peace. His Cross is the altar under which the brand-marked Cain may find pause from the fury which pursues him and get back to speaking terms and Covenant affiance with God. Because of the mediatorial work wrought out for man we never see here the last issue of sin and its consummated penalty. In the present life benign forces retard the tragic fruition of this mysterious soul-malady and the respite has in it the promise and potency of complete final deliverance. A world redeemed by the blood of Jesus was never meant to be a theatre of sheer retribution, and only at intervals does it give vague hints of the severities of this long waiting and deathless law. When we cry out, "I have cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocency," we have set out upon a theory of life as misleading as that from which the Psalmist found relief in God's house. Our own acts have little to do with our standing in God's sight, at least whilst the present initiatory dispensation lasts. However enigmatical and contrasted our changing conditions, we are living in the kingdom of a universal Saviour, though some of us perhaps within the frontiers of that

kingdom have constructed our own gins and toils, shackles and prison-houses. On the gunboat that has run down the slave-dhow and is carrying groups of freed natives back to their homes, some man may chance to find himself in chains. It is one of the crew, perhaps, who has maddened himself through drink, and whom the captain has been compelled to handcuff for the safety of others. And yet the gunboat flies a flag which is a pledge of personal liberty for black and white alike. Every man under the over-spreading heavens comes by the grace of the Mediator into the same standing ground of privilege before God. From sin, in its first onset at least, we are saved, or our ruin would long since have proved irretrievable. A merciful hand picked us up, one and all, out of the dark tidal wave which broke upon the world with the first transgression; but the tidal wave involves a second peril, for a moral malaria may rise up and spread itself out in the wake of the retreating flood ominous of a new destruction to those already numbered with the saved. If an abiding penalty fixes itself on us in the end, it will not be through any offence which lies behind us in the past. Whether we know and appreciate the fact or not, we pass our days in scenes of all-encircling salvation. God could not be the Saviour of one without at the same time being the Saviour of all. Faith, in so far as the Divine inspiration which creates it assumes the form of a logical syllogism, is an inference from the universal to the particular; and the saving faith which starts from anything short of that for its major premises is a phase of personal conceit. Indeed faith cannot work in us a sincere love of all men unless it recognise that they are fellow-transgressors

brought by infinite grace into the same commonwealth of spiritual privilege. Give God the glory which is the right of a universal Saviour, for He has spared no pain, no sacrifice, no toil to realise and illustrate this character in the actual history of the race.

In fulfilment of His part as the Saviour of all men *He sends accredited messengers to announce the good news of a world-wide redemption.* St. Paul speaks of the gospel as having been preached to "every creature under heaven"—that is to say, it was directed to all kindreds and peoples and tongues from the beginning. It was preached to Adam as well as to Abraham to make it catholic; and directly or indirectly all were, through Adam, the heirs of the promise. The note of universality rang out in the very first message, and that note was the signature of its Divine origin. The herald may sleep by the way or prove faithless to his vocation, but his commission is to preach good tidings to all. He who is blind, bedridden, or in exile may miss the announcement posted on the city gates, printed in the Government gazette, and publicly promulgated; but it is addressed, notwithstanding, to every citizen; and blind, bedridden, absent, unlettered must be informed by their friends. To a decision which concerns each member of the community the authorities are bound, under pain of forfeiting their position, to give the widest currency. The announcement is addressed to all, even should those conveying it fail in their task, or those interested in its terms neglect to give heed. Our Lord's last charge to His disciples, as He was in the act of being parted from them, was "preach the gospel

to every creature," and he who neglects his part in giving effect to the comprehensive evangel is a poor, inconsistent servant of the universal Saviour. It is ours to bear Christ's message and to proclaim Him everywhere as the common Helper of the race; and if His Spirit is in us we shall be restless till we are doing it. To fail in this is to make Jesus a partisan and to dishonour the Deliverer of a guilty world. It is at our peril that we think of any living man or woman as outside the benefits of redemption and beyond hope of recovery to love and righteousness. The exclusiveness that qualifies the universal love of Jesus provokes a terrible anathema. Paul speaks of certain Jews who filled up the measure of their sins and brought upon themselves wrath to the uttermost by forbidding the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles; and that crime he looks upon as ethically affiliated to the crime of the men who had crucified Jesus. The Lord is jealous of His honour as the universal Saviour, and by the denial or the suppression of it men complete the sum of their offences. Every man called of Jesus is under obligation to declare that free, undistinguishing, all-inclusive grace which quickens the faith necessary to consummate salvation. He who closes the door against another makes salvation less than universal, and so runs the risk of shutting out himself.

But His part as the Saviour of the world does not end with the great evangel He commits to His disciples. In every part of the world He co-operates with His messengers, and often anticipates their work by a secret ministry of inward illumination. He directs the providences of history so as to make

human hearts everywhere accessible to His help. Those afar off have opportunity to hear, if haply they may be brought nigh. It has been so in every century and it is so now to an extent which the least observant can scarcely fail to notice. Nominally Christian nations control the world. Scarcely a language remains unlearnt, a tongue unsubdued to writing, or a hermit nation secluded from the comity of the vast human family. Great and effectual doors are opened. But God has never put His universal relation to the race at the mercy of a faithless and lethargic Church. His secret sovereignty of grace in some appreciable degree asserts itself. Docile souls in all lands receive from His unseen presence larger gifts than we know. We may trace faint signs of His past as well as of His present immanence in all the great ethnic religions. Within them is a mysterious salt which preserves from corruption amidst noxious environments the reverence, the faith, and the moral capacity of the human heart. In some of the most degraded races a recuperative ethical power operates corresponding to the recuperative powers of the physical life. Familiar knowledge and close analysis find traces of something which makes for uplifting in religions human nature has done its best to degrade into baseness. Many a man rises above the level of his superstitious creed, through the unseen touch of the universal Saviour. God's schemes are world-wide, and no man is an outcast by Divine decree.

The administration of the world shapes itself to the purposes of this universal Saviour. The present life is so elastic in its order and organisation that it may become a paradise in which saved people dwell,

or a purgatory of the banned, as men by their conduct elect to make it. Students see in it different moods and put upon it widely divergent interpretations. The late John Stuart Mill thought the world ought to have been made from the outset a much happier sphere, and whilst in his later days half-disposed to believe that it had a personal author, could not quite reconcile himself to the pain and misfortune of which it was the constant scene. An accomplished contemporary writer speaks of it as a "blighted planet" and depicts all human enterprise as ill-fated. The tables ought to have been spread with confections and the successive scenes of life should have kept the swarming multitudes as blithe and well-contented as a magic lantern at a children's party, when the children are on their best behaviour. He says unflattering things of Fate, Nature, Destiny, because the impressions formed from a study of human life as it is do not shape themselves to pleasant theories of what might have been. Hope is bitterly mocked, especially the hope of the Hedonist. In the world, even as God made it, there are things hard and irksome, and we flatter ourselves that we do not need any such iron *régime*. It must surely be governed by fiends if governed at all. On the other hand, the advocate of "the larger hope" seems to think its pains and penalties are inadequate for the chastisement into piety and righteousness of the preponderating majority of the race. A world more after the model of a Purgatory, in which there was scantier sunshine and less kindly fellowship, a grim dearth of home sweetness and the merriment of children, might have brought to repentance multitudes who are obdurate under the comparatively mild dis-

ciplines of the present. In hot æonial fires of sharper torment the unreflecting must consider their ways and come to salvation. The actual, everyday world is too smiling for their moral and spiritual improvement. When we put one extreme view over against the other and strike the balance, we shall perhaps come to the conclusion that the world is serving the purpose of its King and Saviour fairly well. Its administration is not intended to make thoughtless men happy or to entertain their tastes, but to allure towards good and repel from evil, to heal, to restrain, and to save. A hospital or a dispensary is not organised with the same end in view as a garden party or a social evening, and may even express in less pleasant ways a more genuine good-will.

But the apostle teaches that salvation admits of *degrees and that in the experience of its benefits broadly marked distinctions arise.* It is obvious that the salvation of a moral and responsible being cannot go on for ever by the unrecognised act of another. Such an arrangement would contravene the first law of his nature and degrade rather than uplift him in the scale of life. By the act and the habit of trust he must join hands with his benefactor, and this believing co-operation must extend to every duty which devolves upon him. His life, in fact, must be a life by the faith of the Son of God who loved and gave Himself for him. Between those who are the subjects of a common redemption faith draws notable lines of demarcation. For as many as believe, salvation is continued into nobler and more enduring issues. New disclosures are made of the grace and power of the all-sufficient Saviour. The world denies the special elements in

the experience of believers, asserting that one man is as good as another, and that those who make religion the chief aim of life stand no higher in God's favour than their careless neighbours. In the spiritual universe they apply an axiom of secular equality. Common spiritual privilege we are compelled to assert, for it is a necessary deduction from the Divine righteousness; but the same righteousness compels us to recognise that subsequent distinctions arise. There is an elect of faith, and in the end that elect must vastly outnumber the unbelieving remnant. He who was restrained in the exercise of His healing benignity by the scoffing, supercilious tempers of his fellow-townsmen at Nazareth, is still straitened by the unbelief of the world. Salvation becomes a much more amazing and sublime achievement when the heart offers the right conditions for its successive developments. The same orchid, rose, or rare fruit-strain will yield very different results in Tuscany and in the bleak regions of Spitzbergen. Human nature must cease to be cold and intractable, and must offer to Jesus the best conditions of which it is capable. Where faith is the master-influence in the life, Jesus comes in power and great glory, and the common salvation rises into higher blessedness and splendour. He who in both mind and deed is the Saviour of all men shows a pre-eminent fulness of uplifting power in all who consent to trust Him.

That faith to which the apostle attaches a differentiating power makes the common salvation *a special conscious experience.* The presence of Jesus realised through the inner senses, and a firm persuasion of His efficacious redemptive work, is the essence of

personal faith. Communion with the healing, helping spirit of Jesus brings the welcome element of assurance into our salvation. The salvation to which we are not inwardly alive is partial and incomplete. In this redeemed world many are insensible to the great benefit Jesus Christ has brought down to the race. At times vague hopes may arise within them, which are a faint earnest of faith, but for the most part their souls are overridden with fear, terror, misgiving. A wrath seems to brood about their pathway which needs to be appeased, and they are never quite content. Others wilfully continue in unbelief, and that is obviously more disastrous than ignorance. Salvation lacks something till it is wrought into the consciousness; and faith is the current of force which conveys it into the consciousness. The terrors of famine have sometimes so worked themselves into the brain that they have left behind a fixed idea which persists through the days of returning prosperity. Abundant relief at last comes. The rains fall and new crops bend to the sickle; but the man or woman driven to madness by the stress of dearth can scarcely realise it. Roots are still sought on the hillside, meagre pinches of grain are dealt out for the morning and evening meals, and the nightmare of a starving household haunts the imagination at noonday. The salvation is already there, but it has not wrought itself into the thought and brain, the speech and the common life. The salvation of whose benefits we all in some degree partake, can only become complete when it is made conscious by an act of personal and heart-gladdening faith.

And it is perhaps a kindred truth that *salvation to*

be permanently effectual must be inward, and it can only become inward through the power of faith. In the breast of every man there are lusts and evil leanings which threaten to revive the peril from which we are saved, and unless Jesus be allowed to complete His work within, the grace of His salvation may be received in vain. Faith makes us free to obey the precepts of our great Master, and informs us with the strength of a new life. A recent traveller in Siberia tells his readers that he was soon able to pick out at the railway stations, the bands of time-expired convicts, who were being sent to the free colonies where they had the right to settle. Their steps were short, for they had been long accustomed to bear heavy chains, and they carried their hands before them, for the habit had become fixed through the long years in which shackles had been placed upon their wrists. Years would probably fail to efface that stereotyped posture acquired in the dark days of bondage. But in the kingdom of grace faith perfects salvation by making the life entirely free and bestowing a power which releases from the servile habits of the past. Christ's burden grows easy to the step of faith, and His yoke light, and the believer learns to walk like the heir to a crown.

Far out at sea some ship springs a leak, and when all hope is gone a sail appears upon the sky-line, and passengers and crew are transferred without loss of a single life. The shipmaster is the common saviour of all, but the rescue has various issues for those who were in peril. One man becomes wealthy, another famous, the third a power for good in the state. But others are weak in character, and, in spite of friendly admonition and advice, bring themselves to beggary,

prisons, and violent deaths. Their rescuer perhaps warned of the dangers towards which they were setting their faces, but they did not believe, and only enjoyed a few days of the salvation that was brought nigh unto them. If our salvation is to endure throughout all ages we must obey the word of Him who is its author.

We may undo the salvation already wrought out for us by neglecting to use that gift of faith which makes Divine grace inward and conscious. What an irony to be saved by a sacrifice of incalculable preciousness and a redeeming ministry of incomparable sympathy, and yet to perish at last! A famous Japanese painter tells a story which will serve to illustrate this risk. When he was a boy a fire broke out in the street where he was living. Close by his home was a shop, in which many rare and beautiful birds were kept for sale, and as the flames spread the owner of the shop brought out the birds in their cages, and stacked them in an open space of the street. At last the fire caught the cages, and the owner of the birds opened the doors of the cages and set the fair and radiant creatures free from the fate that was threatening. In a many-coloured flock they rose into the red-tinted clouds, wheeled round in a glittering phalanx, and, by some strange infatuation, flew down into the spurting tongues of flame and perished. Saved by the good-will and humanity of the owner, in a curious fit of ignorance and folly, they yet destroyed themselves. And the human soul, freed by the hand of Jesus Himself, may turn back and plunge itself into a new and tragic ruin. The glamour of sin may betray in spite of all that has been done for us. We are saved, saved into liberty, for the gift of salvation

is inseparable from the recognition of our liberty, but we may so use our liberty as to bring upon ourselves a new destruction.

Let us see to it that we are numbered with those who believe. Be it ours to renounce the pride which keeps us from faith in the work of Jesus Christ. We need to watch against those suicidal prejudices which may make Jesus a fatal stumbling-block. In some countries there is a superstitious objection to amputations, and men would rather lose a life than part with a little finger. If a hospital were put into every street, a doctor sent to every door, and the ministry of healing made universal, it would avail nothing unless the prejudice could first be conquered. The salvation of Jesus cannot perpetuate and perfect itself within us unless the evil prepossession which excludes faith be removed. Pluck out the eye and cut off the hand at His word, and after having had salvation brought nigh unto you, do not run the risk of being cast with two hands and two eyes into the gehenna of doom. Recognise His conditions and treat with Him on His own terms. It is said that during the Hundred Years' War multitudes perished because they could not cry for mercy in the language of the conqueror. You know what language will reach Christ's ear, and move His heart. He is not willing that any should perish. If the salvation wrought out by His Cross is efficacious for all, of course He is not. Who wishes his own pain to be fruitless? Speak the language to which He always responds.

If God is "the Saviour of all men," what a grievous thing it must be in His sight when we convey false views of His character and make the faith which

receives the fulness of His grace difficult for others to attain! We sometimes settle down to conditions of society under which sections of our crowded city populations have to live the miserable, degraded lives of lost souls. One could understand the slum, if the slum-owner, and the Government which is so tender towards him, worshipped a God who reprobates a portion of the race from all eternity. The God of some of the nominally Christian nations, if we may judge Him from the official policy of those nations, has little or no interest in the Pagan races of the world. What! God the Saviour of the helpless, impulsive African, and you allow his tribe to be decimated by unlimited rum carried under a flag that is as sacred to you as the embroidered curtains of the tabernacle to the Israelite? What! God the Saviour of the Chinaman, and you let your Government pay part of the cost of administering India out of the monopoly of a trade which degrades millions of Chinamen, whilst your Christian officials boast of the clever thing they are doing in taxing one Eastern empire for the benefit of another? How can the man whose health and morals you destroy believe in the gracious God of a nation which debauches him for gain? By greed, treachery, avarice, you make Him who should be "the desire of all nations," loathed as though He were a destroyer! You, at least unless you are resisting to the uttermost these anomalies in the life of a Christian nation, are doing your best to discredit Him as a world-wide Saviour. And in a less aggressive degree you may sin against God by hiding back from men the knowledge which will make them sensible of the benign relations into which He has come with the race. You do not believe in

the capacity of some races for the Christian faith? They are made, you say, to be "hewers of wood and drawers of water," to the imperial races. Be candid, and search into the roots of these hasty professions. Do you really believe in a God who is the Saviour of all men?

XIV

THE INSPIRED CREED

"No man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Ghost."—1 Cor. xii. 3.

The apostle is here giving to his readers a test by which they may be able to distinguish between true and false inspirations. For some reason or other tongues, rhapsodies, the vehement fluencies bred by religious excitement, seem to have been held in peculiar favour within the Corinthian Church. The historic associations of the city may perhaps account for this. On a mountain height just across the Gulf of Corinth there once flourished that Delphic oracle to which flocked the world's crowds. Its famous traditions may have predisposed the inhabitants of new Corinth to attach an exaggerated value to every utterance that had upon it the semblance of an inspiration. The man of an eloquence akin to trance-speech was apt to claim for himself a prestige like that attaching to the priests of the famous cave. Some affected this gift of utterance, or cultivated it as an art, because of the halo it put upon themselves and their message. It was of vital importance that rules should be laid down by which the conflicting

voices in this chaos of Pentecost and Babel could be tested and the true discriminated from the false.

As an introduction to his counsels Paul tells these converts, once for all, that they must no longer guide themselves by the traditions of the past. At one time the dupes of sordid imposture, they are now in a new realm and must apply the methods of a new logic. "Ye know that ye were Gentiles carried away by dumb idols even as ye were led." The shrines aforetime accounted places of inspiration are voiceless and the priests who led the people at their will stand confessed for tricksters and charlatans. These old associations must be renounced and a sure and certain principle of guidance must be followed, or their judgments will go astray as in the past.

His first test disproves the claim to inspiration made by those who in a mysterious access of religious fanaticism took it upon themselves to revile the holy name by which the disciples called themselves. "No man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed." A mere truism, we are ready to say, and scarcely pertinent to the great questions which were agitating the Church at Corinth. But when Paul sojourned in the city there were Jews who blasphemed, speaking shameful and bitter things against Jesus. After the apostle's departure these Jews seem to have found their way into the assemblies of the disciples and claiming an inspiration which had been the historic inheritance of their race and copying the vehement methods of utterance current around them they hurled against Jesus a reproach still sometimes heard in heathen lands that the Nazarene must have been a transgressor or Heaven would never have put upon Him these unexampled

sufferings. Such blasphemies given with the tone, gesture, frenzy of the prophet, perhaps directly inspired from beneath, must have pained and perplexed not a few. Now Paul tells them in their distraction they may let their minds rest undisturbed. The subject-matter of the message as well as the manner and profession of the prophet must be brought into the reckoning and will afford a truer test than excited gestures. "No man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed."

And, on the other hand, a living creed which satisfies the conscience, hallows the life and glorifies Jesus Christ is a sufficient witness of the presence and work of the Spirit in the heart. There were men in Corinth on the same religious level as modern Christians, who possessed only the common gifts of the Spirit. The power of healing, of tongues and their interpretation was held back from them, and perhaps cast down by the privation they were tempted to envy their brethren of more striking endowments. It might seem as though they had been passed by in the ministration of the Spirit and were on a lower level of religious privilege. But Paul's words would put new heart in them and encourage them to say, "We are not passed by in the dispensation of the Spirit. It is true we cannot do things which become a wonder to half the city. It is beyond our power to heal, to prophesy, or to discern the secrets of the heart. But from the fulness of quickened and renewed hearts we can testify that Jesus is Lord. And thus we have within ourselves the sure tokens of His sovereignty and exaltation. The illuminating grace of the Spirit is come to us, enabling us to worship the Lord and Redeemer of our souls And

others would be made to feel that the test of the truth which saves is within us, and though we may be edified by a neighbour's testimony, it is vital to cherish in our own hearts the inbrooding presence of that Spirit whose constant work glorifies Jesus the crucified.

I. The evangelical confession has for its central theme *the Divine sovereignty of Jesus.* "Jesus . . . Lord." This title is used in the Four Gospels in several senses. It sometimes denotes ordinary proprietorship, and is then translated "Master." It is also a term of courtesy, and is then translated "Sir." We may dismiss at once these lower uses of the word. The polished Pharisees did not need to be led by inspiration in applying a title of common politeness to Jesus. In fact, amongst smooth and supple Asiatics terms of honorific address are employed with a facility which renders them meaningless. The name is also used to denote the enthronement of Jesus in His incarnate nature at the right hand of power. "He hath made this same Jesus whom ye crucified both Lord and Christ." And yet again it is made to denote the true and proper Divinity of the Son of Man. Not infrequently these two latter meanings merge into each other.

A moment's reflection will show that in the text the title involves these two higher meanings. This letter is addressed to a Church, with a membership drawn from two or three different races of divergent religious training. There was a sprinkling of Jews, a fair proportion of Greeks, a preponderating majority of Romans. The ideas of those forming the Gentile section of the Church were tinctured with old mythologies which were always ready to

find for uncommon heroism a place of honour on Olympus amongst the gods and demigods gathered there. To believe that this incomparable Jew, in recognition of His pure life and martyr death, had been raised to some vague superhuman dignity was quite consonant with the early training of both Greek and Roman, and it would scarcely need a special inspiration of the Spirit to engraft this thought upon the creed of either the one or the other. Is it not obvious that by the title "Lord" the apostle means all that was implied in the old Hebrew word "Jehovah." The true confession recognises that Jesus is a partaker in God's essential nature and sovereign dominion. The Gentile needed a new view of God to give the right accent to this confession, whilst the Jew needed a new view of Jesus. The latter must be brought to realise that the Son of Man whom he had proudly rejected shared the prerogatives of the Most High. In either case a miraculous change must be wrought upon the thought and faith inherited from the past.

The true confession recognises the Divine worth of the suffering endured; the Divine power energising the grace and gentleness of Jesus; and the Divine authority of the ascended King.

The true confession recognises *the Divine virtue of the sufferings borne by the Son of Man.* The victim who trembles with pain and bows His head upon the cross is Lord. By the topic of his earliest teaching in this city the apostle had shaped the course of all local controversies. His one theme had been Jesus and Him crucified. Just as the far-sighted general by a timely movement of his forces can compel the adversary to fight within

certain geographical limits, so Paul by the reiteration of this one doctrine fixed the exact battle-ground of the struggle between the Corinthian Church and its adversaries. From the chapter before us we gather it was round the cross the conflict was raging. The watchword of the disputing sides was "Jesus anathema," or "Jesus Lord." The Old Testament note, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree," seems to ring in the blasphemies directed against Him whom the apostle had preached. On one side the cross stands the Jew directing the finger of scorn against its victim and crying with a fanaticism which simulates the fervour of inspiration, "Stricken," "Afflicted of God," "Forsaken!" And over against Him the rapt disciple cries in grateful love, "Wounded for our transgressions!" And so voice rises against voice. "A sufferer for His own trespass." "Made sin for us!" "Anathema!" "God over all blessed for evermore!" The only form in which the enigma of the Cross presented itself in those early days was "Jesus anathema" or "Jesus Lord." The controversy on one of its sides at least was the rude maxim of Job's three friends applied anew to the last spectacle of suffering innocence, with a scorn and malignity that were diabolic.

Our modern reason boasts other ways of escape from those sharp alternatives in the interpretation of the Cross which presented themselves to the mind of the first century. Jesus was a martyr to His own zeal or a victim of that blind impersonal Fate which holds a restless, writhing universe in its iron grasp. Mr. Beattie Crozier records a curious and painful conversation which he once had with Thomas Carlyle.

The great Scotchman, after referring to some passage in Gibbon which had given the death-blow to his own faith in Christianity, went on to say, "As for Jesus He was a good young man disgusted with the shams and hypocrisies of His time, which His soul could not abide; and venturing with calm indifference into the lion's den of the chief priests and scribes at Jerusalem nobly met His death, as indeed such as He in all times and places have to do." Let us hope these words, if correctly reported, did not set forth Carlyle's last thought about Jesus Christ. The thin, condescending praise of this "good young man" and the unsympathetic reference to the recklessness which made Him one of many martyrs do not err through excess of reverence. He put Himself in the track of an avalanche and perished. But what of the providence which rules in all history and determines progress? The indifference of that presiding Fate which neither shut the mouth of the lion nor made the memory of such virtue and unselfishness a store-house of help and saving power to the after-generations tempts us to hurl at the impassive and unpitying heavens the anathemas hurled by the old-time blasphemers against the sufferer on the cross. Was the cross fortuitous and is our lot cast under conditions where the same sterile tragedy may go on repeating itself to the end? Then are we chained to an evil place indeed, and the firmament presses upon us like a granite pavement upon the underlying seed. If the Supreme Power over us permits a succession of Golgothas from which no harvest can arise, the cross far from being the symbol of hope and love is the saddest call that has ever fallen on human ears. But a sacred and unseen messenger

whispers within us that it was a God-man who was nailed to the tree, and that out of His pains a redeeming virtue arises, mighty, benign, and deathless.

This great saving confession affirms the truth that *infinite strength animates the tenderness and good-will of the Son of Man.* Jesus is Lord on the Mediatorial throne, and His sympathies find there a new centre for their outgoing. If it be true that Divine virtues exalt the passion of the Cross into an atoning sacrifice, it inevitably follows that He must ascend far above all heavens, and that supreme power is put into His hands. The name of Jesus stood in the beginning of the evangel for a brief history of kindness, wisdom, charity, matchless friendship. In the places where St. Paul laboured many of the incidents recorded in St. Luke's Gospel must have been communicated to those willing to hear, for they were the common property of the apostle and his companion. Such incidents could not fail to compel all becoming familiar with them to feel that this life was rarely sweet, beautiful, and healing to the grief-smitten. If every race and every new generation could have a bit of history like this lived in its midst, a new day would dawn upon the world. Such tenderness passing to and fro through the weary multitudes would cause shrivelled hearts to glow with new fire and expand with reviving hope. But love limited to a geographical area and acting within the span of a brief, perishable life cannot greatly help a weak and long-enduring world. Memories of goodness reverently cherished because so uncommon will not avail to bring men out of the prison-house and make them free. Does the influence of this personality persist and persist in vital and conscious form? One who came to Jesus with a

distress bitterer than death was fully persuaded of His superhuman power, but only half persuaded of His gracious intent. "If Thou wilt Thou canst." We are not in immediate historic contact with Jesus, and the factors in our halting assurance are reversed. "If Thou canst Thou wilt." We are sensitive to His gentleness and know He would help us if He were only near. But where is He? The tenderest love in the world is sometimes the most hapless. Resistless power and munificent resource do not always go together with yearning good-will. Was this life, which would have taken ours into its healing embrace, a part of the Eternal? Are the sympathies with which it was tremulous at the helm of the Universe to-day? Can He rule our destinies? Can He overpass limitations and show Himself infinite? Has judgment been committed to His hands and is His absolution final? Is Jesus Lord?

The true confession affirms *Christ's supreme authority as King from whom all law proceeds*, and implies uncompromising obedience to His word. His throne must be set up within us. A sincere conviction and acknowledgment of the Divine authority of Jesus is ever sealed by the surrender of the conscience and the life to His controlling will. At the commencement of His ministry Jesus had to remind those who sat at His feet that there was an unreal use of this title, a homage that flattered the ear, "Lord!" "Lord!" whilst His precepts were treated with neglect and disdain. Such hollow deference pains the heart of Him who is waiting for the submission of the race, and cannot satisfy. Jesus would rather have the respect of an obedient Socinian than the bowed knee of a crooked, contumacious Trinitarian. Neither

yields what He is empowered to ask of men but the one comes nearer to His idea of honouring the Son even as men honour the Father than the other, and is a more hopeful subject for that inward leading through which a complete faith is reached. Salvation cannot be consummated till we find a Teacher beyond criticism, a Guide whose wisdom admits of no dispute, a King to whom passionate lovers of liberty make haste to yield unlimited and absolute sovereignty. When our souls are once permeated by the life-breath of the Spirit, such a Teacher, Guide, and King we cannot fail to find in Jesus. Because human governments are represented by evil and erring men, who may sometimes abuse their position and rule in unrighteousness, we always hold fast to the right of rebellion. In our course through life we meet with even good people to whom we owe a duty,—that of resistance. The apostle encountered many whose ascendency was hurtful and whom he was compelled to check and counteract; but One came into his life who was irresistible, and he accounted himself His bond-slave. There can be no acceptable confession of His Divine sovereignty unless we call Jesus Lord in the spirit of complete ethical submission, bowing our imperfect wills and judgments to His royal perfection. He accepts no homage which falls short of this. We may affirm that He is "of one substance with the Father," "begotten and not made," and be zealous for all the precision of statement found in the great Trinitarian Creeds but unresisting obedience to His precepts, loyalty to His calls within us, responsiveness to all the laws of His high example must be included in the confession which does justice to His person and work.

II. This confession is the effect of *a supernatural movement within the heart.* "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but in the Holy Spirit." The apostles themselves did not clearly and consistently hold the Divine sovereignty of Jesus till the day of Pentecost with its new inspirations, its enlarged outlooks, its more stable assurance had fully come. The wonderful works, together with the resurrection from the dead, had proved superhuman power, and had stopped at that point. The hints the Master Himself had given about His oneness with the Father had been lost in the dismal reflections stirred by sayings about His coming death, for the two facts seemed irreconcilable. Gleams of prevenient revelation had mingled with the disciples' musings and a reverence had been awakened within their souls to which no limit could be put. They had often called Him whom they doggedly followed "Lord" in the lower sense of the word. A veiled ministry within them was already leading their thoughts out into larger fields. When even they beheld the cloud which received Him from their sight faith in this central truth was undefined and incomplete. The Pentecostal gift was both the proof and the interpreting witness of the sovereignty of Jesus. It freed their hearts to receive the great claims the Master had made in the past, and it came also to glorify Jesus by making known new truths concerning His person and delivering power.

In the history of the apostle Paul, whose case is more closely akin to that of believers in the after-generations, the method of revelation is significantly spiritual. He had seen the glory of Jesus in the midday heavens, and yet knowledge of this sacred mystery did not convey itself by the path along

which such strange light travelled. "It pleased God . . . to reveal His Son in me." The witness of the other apostles alone was insufficient for his assurance. He must go forth into the deserts and be pervaded by the voiceless persuasions of that Holy Comforter whose work it was to glorify Jesus. "For neither received I it of men neither was I taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." It was here that his deep, living conviction grew and was strengthened. Intermittent glimpses of a great transfiguration beyond the clouds confirmed his faith, but the rule here laid down that the demonstration must be inward was the rule of his own spiritual history. Visions of the glorious Son of God were the symbolic accessories of faith, but not its foundation.

And the process must be repeated in each succeeding disciple who confesses that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. The steps of the apostolic development are recapitulated in individual history down to the present day. We believe in a Spirit which abides with the followers of Jesus, although perhaps a Church which sleeps or becomes degenerate cannot rightly claim to be His interpreter. We believe that the Spirit guided wise and devout men in building up the fabric of evangelical doctrine, which rests so largely upon principles verified in the experience and the communion of saints. The Creeds command our reverence and often explain and harmonise great mysteries. But the sum of these sacred institutions cannot bring final conviction, and leaves us in the same position as the apostles, who till the descent of the Spirit only worshipped the Lord in rare hours of insight. The true confession must

arise out of an inward unveiling vouchsafed to the man who puts himself under the guiding influence of the Spirit.

The actual as distinguished from the traditional Creed is primarily determined by moral sympathies, and it is at a later stage that reason comes into play to formulate the evidences that justify the Creed and harmonise its several articles with each other. And if ethical is the highest of all truth, it is fitting that this should be the path by which the spirit is led to the shrine where Jesus is worshipped as Lord. The Divine sovereignty of Jesus with its cognate truths cannot be mathematically demonstrated, and that is no less true of the great root-truth of religion, the existence of a God. To reveal the facts of the unseen world in forms which defy intellectual denial would be to despiritualise those facts and to transplant them into the sphere of the sensuous. He who sets himself to discern and to verify Divine truth must be in a right moral condition. The writer of Deuteronomy allows that the false prophet may produce his sign, that his dream may come to pass; and all this is permitted by God to test the sincerity of His people's love. And the Sermon on the Mount is in agreement with this early declaration. The test of the prophet is ethical, and a right ethical temper is indispensable in applying the test. Antichrist has its signs. The arguments of the unbeliever may sometimes surpass in skill the arguments adduced by the believer in support of his most sacred and stable assurances. An accomplished man in the delirium of fever marshals in proof of his hallucinations a science and an ingenuity which the unlettered attendant at his side lacks, and the controversy

between the two can only be settled when the patient's temperature falls. The cool breeze which refreshes and heals the distempered senses will bring with it trustworthy discernments and settle the hopeless dispute. And the wind which bloweth where it listeth must restore to spiritual health and vitalise the inward senses of the man to whom Jesus is an enigma or an offence, before the great confession can be made. No mind untouched by the subtle ministries of the Spirit can receive the Divine sovereignty of Jesus with all that which it involves. If the carnal mind is enmity against God, it is enmity no less against Him who is the perfect image of God and will naturally relegate the story of redeeming sacrifice to the curiosities of religious romance. New inspirations must make a man into an ethical enthusiast before he can become a genuine believer. There can be no valid acknowledgment of our Lord's redeeming Kingship and dominion over the spiritual destinies of men otherwise than in those conditions of mind which the Holy Spirit creates.

That peculiar *sense of need awakened by the Spirit in the heart demands a superhuman Saviour.* There are some things men are not prepared to see till a felt void in their lives compels them to keen and stedfast search. The pinched waif of the city streets has senses twice as sharp as the pampered child of the palace, and acquires a shrewd practical philosophy in which the other is a novice. Great discoveries are rarely made till the requirement presses hard upon the discoverer or some one in whom he is interested. We had no school of tropical medicine till the loss of life in our steaming malarial dependencies made the question urgent and we

are now probably upon the eve of fresh conquests over disease. New developments in the use of electricity are at hand which will owe their initiation to the public wants so clamorously expressed on every side. A decimating famine perhaps opens the eyes of a barbarian race to the value of the treasures hid in its hills and forests. No progress in knowledge and in the arts of civilisation is possible till the spur of privation is felt. And spiritual discoveries rest upon corresponding incitements. When we are appalled at the abysses of evil in our souls, when we see how incalculable are the compensations that must be made for every act of wrong-doing, when we insist that our pardon must have the authority of God's throne behind it, when we see that if there is any uplifting out of our fall, the hand attempting the task must be Divinely strong, we are already brought by the Spirit to the verge of great discoveries.

In olden days those who had most to ask from Jesus paid Him the greatest homage. Peter as he finds himself sinking in the cold waters, the Syro-Phenician woman whose heart was breaking for one dearer than life, the Roman centurion with his pressing petition, call him "Lord." The title had not its full evangelical import in their lips, but it was an onward step, especially as applied to an unfashionable prophet. The sense of need in the dying thief who was falling into unknown condemnations aroused him to see in the quivering form of the Crucified as it loomed through the eclipse, beneath the shame, spitting and dishonour veiling the majesty of Jesus, the Lord of a kingdom of grace and power. The just need always suggests its complementary supply, unless

indeed we are in a fiend-mocked world and our needs only allure us into gulfs of hopeless pain.

The confession of Jesus as Lord is *latent in the affections of that new life which is conveyed by the Spirit.* The method is not primarily intellectual, nor is its issue a technical creed such as might be evolved in the dialectic of a Church Council. The new consciousness of salvation has as one of its contents illimitable homage to Him who wrought out that salvation for us. The Cross requires an Incarnation on the one hand and an enthronement on the other to make its virtues intelligible and self-consistent. There is a correlation between the regenerate instincts within us and the Being of Him whom we yearn to apprehend. A naturalist once predicated the existence of a gorgeously winged creature he had never seen from the structure of a flower. It was obvious the flower must be fertilised from generation to generation by a suitably equipped messenger not yet observed or described. And the forecast was verified. And in the life of the renewed soul there is a spirit of unlimited obedience and submission to Jesus Christ, idolatrous if lavished upon the mere creature, which bespeaks the superhuman attributes of Him whom we have been brought to love and to trust. We have not yet looked upon Him in His enthronement, seen upon His head the many crowns of His wide dominion or caught the first glimpse of the old glory which has come back to Him, but the correlation of the redeemed nature within us to Him who is enthroned above all heavens is unmistakable. The faith, hope, love and reverence in our renewed hearts find their counterpart in a Divine Redeemer.

To the secular historian Jesus Christ represents a point in the fortunes of an obscure race—a point from which a movement dates affecting the world for centuries. To the student of morals He is one who was curiously patient under provocation, heroic in sacrifice, disinterested and unswerving in devotion, and whose name is a living epitome of all that is best in the teachings of sages and lawgivers. His contemporary disciples at first knew Him after the flesh only, and the ideals they saw embodied in His character and mission seemed to have become abortive in the last stage of His career. But the great change came, and they saw Him exalted above all heavens that He might fill all things. How was the gap between the human and the Divine in their conception of Jesus bridged? It is insufficient to say by the resurrection from the dead and the ascension into heaven before chosen witnesses. We may accept the histories of these events and yet fall short in our faith. Love was the motive-force which produced this enlarged view, love inspired and directed by the Spirit. An eminent writer on Science tells his readers that the sensitive ether which forms in every part of the Universe a pathway for the light was perhaps originally of inappreciable bulk. It might have been possible to gather up the nucleus of this substance into an incredibly small space. Heat is the force which has diffused this handful of primeval matter through such immense fields. Its action drives the atoms apart and disperses them over immeasurable fields, so that light at last finds for itself a pathway of all but infinite range. In the beginning, our estimate of Jesus like that of the early disciples themselves, is earth-bound. He

is a dim point in the history of a race never very populous and during His earthly life His influence was not such as accords with our presuppositions concerning One who is the Son of God. But when the Spirit puts into the new man a fervent, consuming affection great enlargements of view begins. "Though we knew Christ after the flesh, yet henceforth know we Him no more." We learn to appreciate the Divine scale of His personality. We find infinite virtue in His Cross, infinite strength in His supporting grace, infinite depths in His sympathy, infinite splendour in the glory that encircles Him. The strong-winged affection of our ransomed spirits needs these boundless heights into which it can soar. The things inconceivable when we lived according to the flesh are actualised as we live in the Spirit, and through His indwelling we call Jesus Lord.

But is this process by which a genuine faith in the Divine sovereignty of Jesus Christ is developed trustworthy? May we not be betrayed into error through inordinate gratitude and affection? Is it not a surrender to similar emotions which has led to the deification of saints and ancestors? To call Jesus Lord because strong exalted affections prompt us, may give rise to a new idolatry based upon the sentiments. To such obvious questions it is perhaps enough to reply that the process is valid only in minds already possessed by a conviction of the Divine unity. The idolatries to which men are sometimes inclined by their natural affections obscure God, but the higher the place we give to Jesus Christ in our thought the more vividly are we able to see the glory of the Father reflected in His character and work. The testimony to which the docile soul is thus led through the

Spirit is not only guarded against capriciousness by the control of the indwelling Spirit but is confirmed both by the word of Jesus and His apostles and by the experience of the saints of all ages.

This subject lends itself to a searching personal application. "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" That question can best be answered by the reply we give to another; "Whom say men that I, the Son of Man, am?"; or rather "Whom say ye that I am?" Is Jesus One who belongs more sensibly to the past than to the present, - a sweet and cruelly troubled dreamer only, an ideal of love and blessedness melting into a golden haze, a retreating shape like that of the friend sailing into the unknown whom our eyes strain after till his vessel has become a speck on the line where sky and sea meet and darkness falls? Or has He saving power? Does He live and is a real sceptre in His hand? Such questions are not unanswerable if the Spirit still makes His abode in human souls. If the promise is to all that are afar off, and it is the appointed work of the Spirit to exalt and magnify the Son, the truth may be known by all who open their hearts to this unseen guest. Whilst we still honour the person, cherish the presence and woo the inspirations of the Spirit, evangelical truth cannot die. It is spiritually based, and no attack can invalidate it. The contest is between the Divine light and life in the faithful and the ignorance and contradiction of human pride, and our trust must ever be in the invincible dialectic of the Pentecost.

XV

BLINDNESS AND INSIGHT

(For the Young)

"I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight."—MATT. xi. 25, 26.

THESE words are a thanksgiving or doxology that came like a strain of unexpected music from the lips of Jesus Christ. The subject of the thanksgiving is that God the Father has given knowledge to the people who were simple, helpless, childlike, and kept it back from those who were wise in their own conceits. The right of God Almighty to take some into His favour and shut out others, at least for a time, is recognised in the title by which He is addressed—"Lord of heaven and earth"; and what looks like harshness in His method of making distinctions is justified by the fact that He is the Divine Father and cannot really act from motives which are finally lacking in lovingkindness to all men. His method is praised by the one Friend of mankind who gave His life for companions and persecutors alike.

Both the Evangelists who report these words lay stress upon the crisis in our Lord's history at which they were spoken. Matthew says it was "At that time," and Luke, who perhaps aims at greater exactness, says it was "In that hour." At what stage in His ministry was this striking thanksgiving uttered? If we look at what goes before the text in the two narratives we may perhaps find instructive touches of local colour in this sudden and mysterious outpouring of the Redeemer's thoughts.

The great Teacher has just been foretelling terrible things about the coming punishment of the cities in which He had preached and wrought miracles of kindness for two years past. He was making ready to break the ties which had bound Him to Galilee, and He remembered that in this belt of cities on the lake shore His toil had been all but fruitless because the scholars and the wise men had from time to time gathered together in groups and companies to spy out His plans, to twist His words, and to resist and destroy His influence. They said He was not properly licensed to teach, the chief Rabbis had not taught Him, the Sanhedrim had not commissioned Him or given Him letters of commendation, and He was a provincial upstart. He had not passed into the upper grade schools and had been working in His father's shop with plane and axe, chisel and saw since He was a boy. Knowing little or nothing of classical Hebrew He could not possibly be a competent interpreter of Moses and the prophets. The well-dressed scholars who thronged the lake-shore towns would never demean themselves by sitting at His feet. To do this might be all very well for rough-handed fishermen and fishermen's

apprentices who had washed off every trace of their schooling in many a storm. Sometimes when they passed Jesus on the highway they smiled haughtily and whispered to the bystanders that people ought to be satisfied with what they could hear in the synagogues and not be always running after irregular teachers. Often they went to Christ's meetings to argue and contradict, and when they found themselves beaten in discussion they had recourse to odious blasphemies. Of course they would not have done all this if they had known that Jesus was really the Son of God, but they could not possibly get to know whilst they continued in their pride. And now by these words of woe Jesus reminds them of the doom they were bringing upon themselves. They were blinded by their self-sufficiency, and it was not God's will to save them till their temper changed. Jesus became a deeper and yet deeper enigma to them at each fresh stage of His history. These were "the wise and prudent" from whom God the Father hid His saving counsels.

In the tenth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, where these words are also recorded, we find that at the time Jesus foretold the doom of the proud, stubborn cities which rejected Him the seventy disciples had just returned from a brief mission tour, excited by their strange success and marvelling at the power they had acquired through faith in their Master's word. In knowledge, experience, and practical sagacity these special evangelists were scarcely abreast with the twelve, and of course the twelve apostles themselves were looked down upon by the Jewish scribes and doctors of the law. These heralds sent out in the last year of the ministry belonged to

the humblest department of Christ's school. The rustic, simple-minded, illiterate men were the babes to whom the Father had made His counsels known. Of course, whilst babes is a figure of speech and means grown-up people who are meek, sensible of their own deficiencies, teachable, it includes also those who are of tender years, because they naturally possess the groundwork of the qualities which prepare the mind for the mysteries of salvation.

In His gloomiest discouragements Jesus found that the Father never failed to cheer Him with tokens of hope and of coming progress, and it was at this time, when few, if any, of the learned and eminent men of the cities to which He had given His best thought and strength and prayer believed on Him, that these simple disciples by an unwavering faith in Himself and an unflinching obedience to His command proved that they had been taught of God.

The blindness which makes to stumble and the insight which saves divide men into two distinct classes, and in both states of mind and the results which follow from them the act of God has its significant part. Jesus describes the act as an act of hiding in the one case and revealing in the other. It is perhaps scarcely necessary to explain the first of these familiar words. To hide means to put into some unnoticed place where it is not easy to find, to secrete in a nook into which neither eye nor hand are likely to go. God puts important and soul-saving truth out of the way of men who are puffed up with conceit of themselves. They never come near the true secret of heaven, the secret of the Covenant which the Psalmist declares is with them

that fear Him. The word "reveal" is less common, and perhaps needs more careful explanation. To "reveal" means to bring that which is obscure or entirely concealed into view. The process may be illustrated in many ways. The diver who is at work on some vessel lost a century ago brings into view hidden things over which the unresting tides have silted deep deposits of sand. The contractor with his blasting powder, boring machines, and swarms of navvies opens a new pathway through the heart of the hills and brings into view an old and forgotten Roman villa or fortress and casts light upon the habits of those early invaders. Men had little idea of what lay beneath the turf and the thick bracken. He reveals the history of fifteen hundred years ago and admits us to another world. In some disentombed cities we may watch the ruts in which chariots ran and the scored pavements on which the ancients played their games of skill or chance. An Egyptian explorer found by the side of the mummy of a child a set of balls cut in stone and nine or ten uprights of the same material. For a time he could not imagine what use these things could have, and at last it dawned upon him that Egyptian children must have played a game similar to skittles as played on the south-east coast of our own country. Those granite toys put into the grave of a little child bring back a picture of an Egyptian home four thousand years ago. We see those curious, demure figures of antiquity smiling upon the frolic of their child, and when the child is taken away putting the playthings by the side of the poor little mummy, and we feel that in domestic affection they are akin to us. The spade of the antiquarian brings into light

a home-life like our own, where we could have had interests in common with the rest. And that is what God's revelation in the heart of the babe does. It brings into light a love and a sacred fellowship, a sublime winsomeness, a secret of good-will hidden for countless ages from the eye of reason. The truths of salvation were covered up from the wise and prudent so that they could not see them, but brought by the grace of the Father before the view of all such as were simple, unpretending, and child-like in character.

What are the special truths of which Jesus speaks as hidden from some and made known to others? Perhaps He gives us some explanation in the verse which follows this doxology, which is introduced as though it were meant to be a comment for the disciples. He speaks of three things—the sovereign power committed to His own hands, the Father's insight into the mystery of His own being and work, and His own immediate and exclusive knowledge of the Father.

The insight which saves discerns *the power and authority of Jesus Christ.* Our Lord could not fulfil His great ministry to the souls of men unless He received from the Father strength, dominion, infinite sovereignty. "All things are delivered unto Me of My Father." That is to say, in His work of enlightening and redeeming men the resources of the Godhead are put under His command. Great powers are often committed to men like unto ourselves in serious emergencies. It would be useless sending out the fire brigade to fight down the flames which are threatening to devastate a city unless the captain and his foremen have power over the water

mains and can command the turnkey. He can even pull down buildings. If the rights of this heroic brigade which has come rushing to the scene of danger are not to exceed the rights of common citizens they might as well have stayed at home. When serious sickness has broken out in the home and the doctor is called in he exercises more authority than the king himself, saying what food must be cooked, what doors must be open or shut, who may come to the house and who must stay away. Unless he has authority on these and many other subjects he can do nothing and will decline all responsibility. It is useless the pilot going on to the bridge to take a ship through the narrows or between shifting sandbanks if there are engineers at the levers who resent his interference and mutinous quartermasters at the wheel. He cannot promise to berth the ship in safety unless the captain himself will obey. The great Lord of heaven and earth has given all things into the hands of Jesus Christ so that He may save mankind from the peril and destruction which threaten it. He has said to the Son, "All worlds are placed at Thy feet, angels are the servants of Thy will, and the forces which make history are under Thy control, so that the lost may be sought and found." The childlike disciples had come to know the power and authority which had been given to Jesus by His Father, and trusting in that power they had accomplished works which seemed to overthrow the very princes of the power of the air. They were growing into a new generation of conquerors through their fellowship with this despised Man of Nazareth in whose life such a secret was hidden.

Jesus goes on to tell His hearers that *the full truth concerning Himself is known to God alone and must be conveyed to others by His revelation of grace.* "And no man knoweth the Son but the Father." From what fount of mystery the person of the Son took its rise, what filial love He had given to the Father before He came into the world, how free from spot of defilement and imperfection His character had been from the beginning, what high counsels He was working out in His Incarnate life, the ignominious death He was to die and the efficacy that death was to derive from the majesty of His Being and the perfection of His righteousness—all these things lay at first in the unsearchable depths of the Divine mind and were at last conveyed to men through the Spirit of the Father. Sincere and devout Jews here and there had convinced themselves that Jesus was superhuman and that His mission was of high significance, but beyond this point they could not advance unhelped. The man who exulted in his own learning and sagacity was unable to unravel the problem of Jesus and His redemptive vocation. God the Father knew it and He alone, and if men were to learn He must needs teach it as He inwardly taught it to Simon Peter. If the Lord's secret is with them that fear Him, it is the Lord Himself who confides it to their docile and reverent hearts. And on the other hand Jesus was the only fit person to tell men what was entirely true about God, for He had been His closest companion and understood what the greatest angel failed to fathom. "Neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." He could convey to men what it most concerned them to learn about Him whom they had

worshipped from afar. An inward whisper taught the babes that Jesus was showing to them the real living mind, character, and purposes of God, and that in clinging to Jesus they touched the Eternal presence itself and were hallowed and comforted with the power of a new and endless life. Such were the things that had been hidden from the wise and prudent and made known unto babes.

We must not be misled by the idea that in these solemn and striking words Jesus Christ is making light of true wisdom. There is a wisdom after which all must seek, which begins in the fear of the Lord—the wisdom praised by Solomon in such noble and eloquent language. The Divine mind is replete with every kind of knowledge. In the Book of Proverbs we are told that Wisdom was there when God laid the foundations of the earth, and whatever else in the Bible may be hard to believe, this is not. It would have been a poor, uncongenial, ill-conditioned world, that we should be able to leave without regrets, unless much wisdom, science, philosophy had guided the making of it. It is a false and not a genuine wisdom boasted by those from whom God hides the secret things concerning His Son. The skilled methods in one realm of research and experience may be sheer madness if transferred to a dissimilar realm. The wise and prudent whose minds are judicially darkened are those who think they can find out God and the mysteries of His salvation by wit, scholarship, cleverness. They treat God as they would deal with His handiwork, and assume that the reason and the senses combined are adequate channels for the inflow of His knowledge. The wise and the prudent hope to understand God by a use of their natural aptitudes

and resent the call which bids them be converted and become as little children so that they may enter into the kingdom. Perhaps they even reverence the letter of the Bible like the ancient scribes and charge their memories with its histories, its precepts, and its rites, expecting that these qualifications will admit them to God's counsels. The babes, on the other hand, are those who feel themselves weak, helpless, untaught, who know nothing of themselves and meekly wait for that guidance from on high which shall replenish their souls with saving knowledge.

Let us try and realise more clearly these opposite states of mind which God deals with by such opposite methods and which in the end come to mean entrance into the kingdom or exclusion from its honour and blessedness. If defeat and humiliation belong to some and high distinction to others it is well for us to understand in detail the dispositions upon which so much is made to turn.

It would be instructive if we could have descriptions of the babe from those who have just reached the strength and superiority of early youth. A babe? A provoking piece of helplessness that always needs watching and caring for, especially in the older children's playtime. A tiny being housed in a cot like fish or insect in a shell and scarcely troubling himself about events outside the world of rug, blanket, and rattle. A frail, groping life that must cling fast to some guardian spirit if it is to thrive, just as ivy clings to the stones of the wall or the stout trunk of a tree. A handful of shy, outpeeping affections and sensibilities without logic, learning, or acquired knowledge to guide them. A newly moulded vessel waiting to be filled with light, strength, heroism, and

all the exciting interests of an unknown world. A mystic chord ready to wake into music as the hand of love is laid upon it. A little bit of humanity constrained by unseen influences to trust before the lips shape themselves to utter the instincts rooted there. And how shall we describe the self-conscious philosopher who is contrasted with the babe?—One whose wisdom has tempted him to undue self-reliance, who thinks he knows enough to take care of himself both now and hereafter, and who wants no pious busybody to hang about his steps. Do we not see him lifting his head high in God's creation and striding to and fro as though he had mastered all secrets and were more than the equal of kings? Depending neither upon God nor his fellow-man for the satisfaction of his special tastes, he finds a world large enough to fit his ambitions in the well-stored mind of which he is so vain. His reason grows out of all proportion to his affection, and his heart contracts at last like the wizened kernel of an over-kept nut. He is so brimful of learning, so exalted with the interests of his special research, that he despises the simple emotions of life. He can discourse to his own soul the kind of music he likes best and never gives up the chords of his nature to the touch of a spirit greater and holier than his own.

It is scarcely necessary to apply this in detail to the great question with which Jesus was dealing. The wise and the prudent from whom God's salvation is hidden are those who trust their own discernments and resent help, who have no true sense of their weakness and folly, whose excessive pride robs them of the power to trust in God and follow His secret guidance, and who spend their lives in a quest as

pretentious as it is barren, whilst they will not wait for God and watch for the smile of His forgiving love. The disposition represented by that of the babe is equally obvious. He to whom saving insight comes and all the privilege of a direct revelation from the Father has learned to say, "I can neither know nor do of myself, and am less than nothing. If cut off from the saving care of God I must die. I breathe and move through His pity and can only stretch out imploring hands for His help." To all such the Father makes known the great saving truths concerning His Son.

But did not Jesus come to save the wise men as well as the babes? Was He so embittered against the scribes and doctors who tried to thwart His influence that He thanked the Father for having withheld from His adversaries the gift of saving insight? Did He not pour out His life for all with a pity into which no faint memory of resentment entered? Certainly. But in this doxology our Lord was thinking not so much of the doom of the spiritual outcasts as of the fact that the new kingdom was administered by a specific rule, and a rule must put out those who do not agree with it whilst it takes in those who submit to its requirements. A rule is like a door which cannot shut in without at the same time shutting out. When the head of the house goes round at night-time and sees that all the windows are closed and the doors bolted, the shutting in for the peaceful, sleeping children is a shutting out for the thief, the drunkard, the roving madman who may be prowling through the streets. The law of selection rules in all kingdoms of life, and there can be no selection without rejection. When God resolved to make known Jesus as Saviour

to the humble and the childlike, that of course implied that redeeming truth was to be hidden from all who did not answer to the character sought. The one thing could not be done apart from the other. Of course God could tell how the rule was working in practical life and would continue working to the end of the world, and He knew the personal name of every enlightened babe and of every blinded wise man ; but acceptance or rejection was a question primarily determined by classification of character and in no sense by name and personal identity dissociated from disposition.

The choice of the fresh, childlike temper for special insight and holy service is *a rule running with unbroken consistency through the Scriptures.* It is suggested in the brief story of Cain and Abel. The elder brother seems to have been betrayed into a mistaken sacrifice by pride in the skill with which he had improved the fruits of the earth. His gifts and offerings, though not evil in themselves, were the innovations of a sophisticated mind. The history of Joseph and his brethren is stamped with the same idea. The elder brethren, with their wide experience of the world, could not believe that the youth who had spent his life in the family tent and had been made dreamy and soft-fibred by an old father's fondness could rise to eminence. His simplicity, in their rough judgment, was akin to weakness. In the last days of the judges God speaks through a guileless lad whose soul is attuned to the whispers of the tabernacle and sets aside Eli with His wide experience and His slack expediencies. The election in the house of Jesse illustrates the guiding rule afresh. The greatest king and the sweetest singer

of Israel was so guileless and inexperienced that his father scarcely thought it needful to call him from the duties of the sheep-farm when the prophet came and caused the other sons who were men of affairs to pass before him. Jeremiah thought himself disqualified for the prophetic work to which God called him because he was but a child, and that was the very reason why God wanted him for the difficult tasks of his age. And in the New Testament the same motive rules the call to the fellowship and service of Jesus Christ. And the law asserts itself in the spiritual history of Christianity through all the succeeding generations. God needs fresh, docile, simple natures for the revelations of His love and the enterprises of His kingdom.

Jesus rejoiced in the special grace vouchsafed to the simple and the childlike because it was through the achievement of those whom the world accounted weak and foolish that *human pride could be effectually humbled and God alone be glorified.* When honour from above does come to the wise and prudent they are inclined to boast of their own strength and success. The clever people who come into the kingdom of God and further its interests are always under a temptation to think that they have put the kingdom under some kind of obligation. The city of God which Jesus had come to found in His own self-humiliation and sacrifice has no place for self-applauding Nebuchadnezzars. God is its builder, and His name must be extolled. In the reign of Jehoshaphat a victory was won over the forces of the Moabites and the Ammonites by the priests and Levites who, at the bidding of their king, marched forth in their temple vestments and, confronting the

invading armies, sang, "Praise the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endureth for ever." After such a victory it would be unnecessary to settle the merits of competing commanders who had contributed to the splendid feat and distribute honours and munificent emoluments. The glory would belong to the God who had magnified Himself through such unworldly strategy and put panic into the souls of the invaders. And the victory over the world's rage and blasphemy, the final overthrow of evil and all the mysterious powers which aid and abet it, will be brought about by the songs and the testimonies of the babes. When the priests and scribes, affronted by the Hosannas of the lads in the temple-courts who echoed the acclaim of the outside multitudes, reproached Jesus for permitting the outburst, His reply was, "Have ye not read in the Psalms, 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast ordained praise'?" The quotation would complete itself in the memory of His hearers, "That Thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger." The incident was a type of the near future. His kingdom was to be set up and His victories advanced by the lispings of the simple and childlike so that God alone might be glorified. And that vision of things at hand was present when He uplifted His voice in this ascription of thanksgiving at the close of His ministry in Galilee.

The special truths which were to be brought home to the heart by the mission of Jesus *required for their special soil the childlike temper and disposition.* The fresh, quick, confiding mind greets the unveiled mysteries of the gospel with delight, for the earliest knowledge of common things has come by a series of

revelations and the receptive habit is not yet lost. In the minds of the wise and the prudent, unless much humility has attended the growth in knowledge, this temper of openness to what is new has ceased and the ground is already occupied. For the quick growth of a new civilisation the virgin soil is needed, and where old civilisations are in possession of the field changes and modifications are slow, difficult, and often inadequate. A world of fresh ideas was to take its rise from the mission of Jesus, and those ideas needed the genial unwasted soil of the childlike disposition. There is a responsive trust, a glowing gratitude, a union of wonder and worship in the first stages of moral and intellectual growth which disappear from a mind accustomed to feed on the spoils of its own knowledge and research. We find a faint type of this law of selection in the life of the home. The older children of a family often affect a specious and premature stolidity and independence, proudly resenting endearments they had once welcomed. A wall of reserve is built up between their own hearts and the hearts of those who are nearest to them; and even a mother has to pour out all her perfervid love upon the younger children who find their world in her presence. She cannot express her deepest and most sacred feeling where the atmosphere tends to become frigid and to hail down little shafts of scorn and satire at intervals. There is a hint of demarcation, and to those on the one side of the faint line all the love of the heart is told, whilst to those on the other there is often an outward appearance of aloofness and reserve. And that is a type of what takes place in the spiritual world.

This discrimination in favour of the weakness

typified by the babe *satisfied the sense of pity in Jesus Christ* and made His doxology a tribute of praise to the gentleness of the Divine Fatherhood. The motto of good men everywhere in times of peril and distress is, Save all whom it is possible to save, and begin with the helpless. In pestilence, famine, fire, and shipwreck true chivalry demands that the children must be first cared for and put into safety. Weakness makes a dumb appeal against which no humane heart can ever steel itself. When bands of missionaries were recently fleeing from the flame and sword of the Boxers in North China, it is said in one case that the hearts of a gang of demoniac fanatics were melted by the prattle of a missionary's child, and they ran away and left their repulsive work to others. The most cruel races are sometimes tender to little children, and this last sign of goodness often persists where moral degeneration is all but complete. This humane instinct has a vein of prophecy in it, for more is to be hoped for from the young, and from those who keep themselves young, than from others. The heart of Jesus was always going out towards the weak and the childlike, and He felt Himself at one with the Father's counsels. He could almost forget the fateful blindness of the wise and the learned who were unresponsive to His ministry as He saw with unerring vision the presence of the Father abiding with these babe-like souls and filling their thoughts with light and saving grace. In this mysterious invocation the Saviour's heart melts with tenderness towards the children and childlike men whose privilege it is to enter into the kingdom.

The rule of selection is not so hard towards those who seem to be placed at a disadvantage by it as has

often been thought. *It involves no final reprobation of persons or even coteries.* As some one has said, It is an easier thing for the wise man to humble himself and become as a little child so that he may receive the gift of saving insight, than it would have been for the child to become wise in the conventional sense of the term, if the rule had been reversed. To the learned who stumbled at spiritual truth Jesus declared the possibility of a birth from above which should give them new powers of discernment. He spoke of a conversion which would make His disciples, and outside hearers likewise, as little children. In the working of this rule Jesus saw a sign that the salvation He had come to accomplish was to be for the many, and He was well pleased. If the wise and the prudent, the sacred scholars and the political opportunists of the day had been chosen, the Church of the redeemed would have been no bigger than the great synagogue in Jerusalem or the senate of a modern university. It would not have been more arbitrary to bestow Divine favour upon men who measured over six feet than to make the gift of saving insight the distinction of those who had already earned to themselves honours in learning and philosophy. It is not possible for every man to qualify himself for the company of the wise and the prudent. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred have no capacity for the abstract pursuits of moral science, and of those who possess the capacity not one man in ten has the opportunity of cultivating and developing his aptitudes. All men can be babes in spirit, leaning only upon the mercy and power of God and opening up all the inlets of the mind to God's secret gifts of light and consolation. And thus the rule of mystic

revelation shuts out no one who does not resolutely shut out himself.

In the natural world we sometimes find failure to see where there is perfect natural capacity for it, and the power to see where we least expect to find it. On the moors crossed by the telegraph wires which pass over the border into Scotland, large numbers of grouse are often found wounded and dead upon the ground. As they have flown in the dim daybreak they have failed to see the obstructing wires. On the other hand, the bat, which is proverbially blind, never makes a fatal error of that sort. It is supposed that bats see through some special sixth sense which makes the wings alive with discernment. A naturalist once stretched strings across a room, attaching a bell to each string. When the night was perfectly dark he turned a number of bats into the room. No bell was rung, for again and again the creatures flew to and fro without striking a single interposing string. The seeing was most perfect where there was little apparent promise of it in the development of the eye. A brood of young eagles could not have performed any such feat. And the insight which saves from moral ruin is often given where we least anticipate, whilst the wise and the learned and the mighty rush against God's interposing laws, bringing upon themselves frustration and judicial pain.

Let us cultivate this simple, open-minded responsiveness and sensibility to God's teaching and saving grace. Children sometimes try to throw off the childlike disposition as soon as possible, forgetting its high value in the spiritual life. One of the great sages of the East once said, "The great man is he who does not lose the heart which he had as a

little child." If fresh, frank, tender simplicity is fundamental to moral greatness in common life how much more so in the kingdom of God. Beware of a spurious self-vaunting wisdom, and never affect mere grown-upness. Be God's child, always watching for His smile, stretching out hands for His help and waiting to know His saving secret.

XVI

THE RESISTLESS RESURRECTION

"It was not possible He should be holden of it."—Acts ii. 24.

These words were spoken by Peter when he was a new convert to the fact of our Lord's resurrection from the dead. No less than the apostle of doubt himself, he had been overwhelmed by a cold, blinding avalanche of mistrust, but he did not glory in the momentary failure of faith as though it were a badge of superior thoughtfulness, and his doubt yielded promptly to the logic of events. Through the tense, terrible stages of that crucifixion to which he had added by his faithlessness new ingredients of pain and shame, and whilst his Master was still sleeping in the grave, he could not anticipate that the life so cruelly mutilated would be restored and transfigured, nor indeed conceive of the possibility of such events as occurred in the Easter day-dawn. A few weeks back his despair had been as sullen and obstinate as his faith is now emphatic and unhesitating. It seemed to him that the promise of Christ's work had miscarried and that the forecasts of the Old Testament were finally discredited. This chief of

the apostles was finding the world sad, unwelcome, hopeless, and he and his dispirited comrades were the last draggled fugitive survivors of a heroic cause. His difficulties were as formidable as those which confront men who are averse from supernatural faith at the present time—perhaps more so. That through the defilement and humiliation of the tomb Jesus should reach the sacred sovereignty to which He had been designated was a proposition against which a hundred arguments might be urged. When the resurrection miracle was already an accomplished fact, rather than credit the signs which attested it, his imagination suggested the theory that the shame and indignity heaped upon his holy friend was breaking out in new outrage and that the tomb itself had been rifled of the sacred form placed there by reverent and loving hands a few hours before. The Cross was not the close of the tragedy but the starting-point for fresh dishonours, and the malice of the Jews had set itself to pour unending obloquy upon this holy cause by affronting the dust of its founder. Such were the views which dominated his temper and attitude of mind.

But this mood of perverse hopelessness soon passed. Simon Peter had been driven out of it by the logic of plain, incontrovertible facts. More than once, after the resurrection from the dead, it had been his high privilege to see his Lord and hear words of comfort, rebuke, and sacred commission from his lips. But the terms in which he speaks of this supreme miracle show that he had done more than submit himself to the plain historical argument, which only just converts the incredulous. All the difficulties he had hitherto felt about the rising from the dead had now ranged

themselves on the opposite side of the question. It could not be otherwise than that Jesus should come forth in triumph from the tomb. That Jesus should surmount corruption and death and rise again before the view with a new stamp of power and glory upon His human life, was one of the magnificent inevitabilities of the Divine Government. "It was not possible that He should be holden of death." There is a singular affluence in Peter's faith that almost startles us. A man might conceivably yield to the weight of evidence and affirm the facts without going so far as this. What had brought about his new attitude of mind, his overflowing, aggressive, invincible confidence?

1. The new baptism of light and power, which had come upon him had brought not only conviction of the truth of this great event but sympathy with its innermost motive and interpretations. He had just become possessed with a new appreciation of the dynamics of the spiritual world, and this had a more dominating influence over his faith than even the witness of his physical senses. The illimitable forces pervading the kingdom of the risen Lord which had first expressed themselves in the victory over the grave were now asserting their mastery in his own personal consciousness. A race impoverished with disease, and wasted well-nigh to the point of extinction with cycles of famine will scarcely believe in the feats of strength and victory attributed to its own ancestors. The stories told of the heroes of other races seem like idle tales. But if disease can be checked, chronic famine averted, and the tottering frames of the wasting tribesmen be recovered to bounding health, the impossible will become possible again. The marvels of modern

science told to those whose brains have been enslaved by the routine education of benighted centuries are at first quite incredible and are dismissed with scorn ; but when the education is widened and new conceptions of the illimitable resources of Nature are placed within the mind, the record of discovery and invention is trusted and anticipations arise to which no limit can be put. A new sense of strength dawns and a new belief in human achievement. And the apprehension of power which awoke within Peter as the kindling fire fell upon himself and his fellow-disciples made him not only accept the miraculous fact which had been attested to the eye and ear and touch of many, but to perceive also that in this new universe of power which was beginning to assert itself over him, it was inconceivable that our Lord's resurrection should not have taken place. He was always a man of positive temperament, and from the blackest abyss of doubt he rises to the loftiest zenith of faith. It is well to be audacious, and when we have sufficient reason to take firm, strong ground ; and Peter felt justified in asserting that if God was and if He had authorised the revelations of the past, God could not do otherwise than bring His Son out of the darkness and privation into which He had been plunged, and in the integrity of His Incarnate Person set Him at the right hand of power. It is often because we are the unconscious devotees of a materialistic philosophy and the slaves of its limitations that we cannot believe in the resurrection from the dead ; and when, like Peter on the day of Pentecost, the channels of our life are filled with the flood-tides of the Spirit, we cease to dogmatise about the possible and the impossible and our difficulties disappear.

Those who are the victims of distressing nervous derangement sometimes get the idea they cannot cross a bridge, walk down a familiar street, or go out of doors when the wind is in a quarter against which they have conceived a prejudice. These curious fancies are the flickering phantom impossibilities of a distempered brain, and they vanish when health comes back and sane, rich blood begins to course once more through the veins. And the difficulties which beset the subject of the resurrection and seem to make it incredible are the result in part of the defective and impoverished spiritual conditions in which we live. When we gain the new life, which Peter felt throbbing within him, the hard things that baffle the reason and overtax the imagination pass away. Peter had acquired an enlarged sense of Divine power in virtue of which he could welcome, without strain, his Master's resurrection from the dead. All historic evidence apart, it was inconceivable that Jesus should be finally abandoned to shame, obloquy, and the unending sleep of an ignominious death. If God indeed did reign, and the character of Jesus was all that the disciples had thought, the alternative to the resurrection was inconceivable. "It was not possible that He should be holden of death." The horrible oppression which had fallen upon the faith of this apostle was dispelled by that Divine fulness with which he had been filled.

2. The apostle's new insight into the Scriptures compelled the conviction that the resurrection from the dead was a predetermined fact that could not have been otherwise. Till Jesus opened their understandings the disciples themselves lacked the key by which to interpret the intimations of the sacred

writers. The inviolability of Scripture is bound up with the great resurrection event to which Peter testifies. He recites in this Pentecostal discourse the triumphant climax of the sixteenth Psalm, making it descriptive of the stedfast spirit and personal experience of David's Son. This may have been one of the Scriptures explained to the two who were on the way to Emmaus, and perhaps Peter had the direct authority of the risen Lord for the application he makes of those wonderful words. On what principle is this ancient hymn of the temple made a specific and unmistakable prophecy of the Messiah's victory over death? Interpretation has its strict rational canons, and an apostle must not be arbitrary in saying this or that writing points to the Son of Man. Perhaps the Psalmist himself had only a vague consciousness of the fact that he was speaking of the Divine King to whom the hopes of devout Jews turned, for the inspired man was the channel of revelations which widened out beyond the range of his own immediate apprehension. The Psalm expresses an ideal of character, which the writer himself imperfectly fulfilled, and announces far-reaching and victorious hopes which bear their grandest fruit only in the one who achieves such a character. The love and the faith celebrated in that famous song, when once perfectly exercised, could not fail of a sure and speedy recompence. Who before Jesus had attained to this ideal of always living in Jehovah's presence and rejoicing in that beatitude of fellowship which death could not darken or destroy? That picture of the ideal life, with all the privileges inherent in it, was inspired and no mere day-dream of a soaring fancy; and when the Man from heaven,

whom the description appropriately characterised, was come and had fulfilled His mission, the Eternal could not do otherwise than respond to His faith by an unwonted gift of life. The saints of early days who were translated that they should not see death had soared to no such heights of spiritual perfection. If one who set the Lord always before him and uplifted his song of trust and victory on the confines of Sheol should, indeed, be left in darkness and corruption, the sacred literature of the past would be discredited and the books of Moses and the prophets prove no better than other books. The rolls treasured in the chests of a hundred synagogues were not, surely, the records of aborted covenants and discredited promises. At the end of the ages David's aspirations might find a far-off fulfilment even in his own experience; but they must first be honoured in the holy and blameless Son, so that at last they may be accomplished in others. The resurrection was one of the moral necessities of providential history, and when Peter declares that it was impossible for death to retain its hold upon the humanity of Jesus, he was asserting in another form the strong, resistless, inviolable hopes expressed in the Scriptures. The events of the last few weeks had made the treasured records of the past new. Simon Peter had come to see that the Scriptures were written from beginning to end with Divine decrees which could not be overthrown, and all other covenants which secured the well-being and salvation of the race were comprehended in the covenant established with the Son. "It was not possible He should be holden of it."

3. This necessity of which Peter speaks was

rooted in the Divine righteousness. It was impossible that death should hold Jesus captive because of the unexampled perfection of His character, if, indeed, it was under a reign of moral law that He had lived and offered Himself as a sacrifice in death. No higher level of spiritual distinction than that reached in the humanity of Jesus can be conceived, and it passes belief that the God and Father, who had shown His approval by signs and wonders, should withhold this last sign and wonder which sealed with outward acceptance the last matchless act of a matchless life. The past history of religion offered no parallel to the spirit and service of Jesus, and it was not fitting His honour should fall short of that bestowed upon the illustrious saints of former times. The best characters of the former dispensation had their limitations, but this had never stopped short or halted for a moment. His was the first life in which the flesh had been completely sanctified, for no blemish and no disobedient passion had ever appeared within it. It was fitting this holy flesh should receive the stamp of unexampled honour. The patience, the meekness, the mercy, the filial devotion of Jesus had been put to the tremendous test of the Cross, and had met the test as human virtue had never met even milder tests before; and yet the contempt of those who called themselves God's people had been poured upon Him. He was buffeted, spit upon, scourged, tortured, in pitiless irony of His claims. Heaven will surely show itself callous to moral distinctions unless it put upon the human side of this personality the seal of a significant approval. Peter seems to intimate that God was under a special obligation to vindicate the sufferer,

for he has just said that it was by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," that Jesus was surrendered for a time into these cruel and wicked hands. The tragedy was not one from which God could hold Himself entirely free and irresponsible. If God had permitted all this He must surely feel the call for interposition. This death needs to be singled out from other deaths and its spiritual virtues be attested for the contrite trust of all men. "It was not possible He should be holden of it." The hour for a Divine intervention had come since the decay of the flesh is the dire humiliation allotted to the sinful, and in all the great ethnic religions incorruption is accounted a concomitant of saintship. God could not confirm the reproach of the adversaries by suffering His Holy One to see corruption.

Death is more than a dishonour. Apart from the redeeming victory over death, it is a state of disquietude and privation. Peter tells us that God raised him up and "loosed the pains of death." The expression seems to imply that the divorce between body and spirit leaves a sense of distress behind, even when the last breath has been drawn. It is not necessary to assume that the spirit of our Lord passed as a wayfarer through the prison-glooms of the condemned, but disembodiment involved privation. The human life He had made one with the life He possessed as the Eternal Son was not yet perfect. The spirit wedded for thirty years to a pure, loyal, umblemished body must have had a sense of bereavement when the separation came, and came too in such a terrible way. The active man suddenly paralysed, the musician who loses his hearing by accident or disease, the artist in whom the light fails,

is weighted by disability, although free perhaps from acute pain. Disembodiment has its penuries and isolations ; but this Holy One cannot be left to such mixed experiences, for His flesh is spotless and never dragged down the faithful spirit. If His character has been all that Peter thinks a timely arrest must be put upon the dishonour of corruption. God cannot suffer the work of the red-handed adversaries of Jesus to be final. There is a resistless moral necessity that He should reverse it both for Jesus' sake and for the sake of a redeemed world. "It was not possible that He should be holden by it."

4. When Peter declares that the resurrection of Jesus was one of the necessities of the Divine order he has in view the truth that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. The apostle has recovered the lost faith of his great confession at Cesarea Philippi. Because Jesus was the first-begotten before all worlds it was meet that He should become in His Incarnate life the first-begotten from the dead. After wicked hands had slain no decay could work havoc upon the form in which God had become manifest to men. It was a mystery that He should die once, explained only by the fact that He was giving His life for the sins of others, but that this flesh He had assumed should crumble into common dust, whilst the dislodged spirit wandered through the dim underworld or went back to the bosom of the Father with every vestige of humanity shed into the abysses of oblivion, would have staggered faith and prolonged the momentary eclipse into eternal midnight. The world could never have given its most sacred faith to a martyr sleeping in a tomb like the kindred dead around him, nor could His appointed life of inter-

cession, throbbing with human sympathies, have been lived in the holy place in heaven. If Jesus was the Son of God in any pre-eminent sense He could not do other than rise from the grave. Apart from this fact the Incarnation itself would have been a fugitive phenomenon in the life of the universe—an incident terminating in the Cross. For God to manifest Himself in flesh destined to perish would have been the paralysis of the Infinite, the eclipse of Eternal light, the victory of evil. When Paul applied to the event of the resurrection the words of the second Psalm, "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee," he implied that the Incarnation with its imperishable potencies was only just beginning to act through the wider domains of human life.

Again and again does the apostle of the Gentiles bring the resurrection and the Divine Sonship of Jesus into relation with each other. He was "declared," or "marked off," as men delimit a frontier, "to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." Here ran a separating line which distinguished Him from the rest of the race. The event stood alone and would have implied no testimony to a peculiar type of sonship if it had immediately become the common rule in human destiny. For the time being it admitted no general repetition. Till the faith of the world had been won and every knee made to bow, till the disembodied spirits of the past had been fitted by their fellowship with Jesus for a new and nobler life in the flesh, Jesus could only be the "firstfruits" of them that slept. In his letter to the Colossians Paul also tells us that Jesus was "the Head of the Church" and "the firstborn from the dead," "that in all things He might

have the pre-eminence." To mark His incomparable rank a term of time must be put between His resurrection and that of His disciples, just as men put a space round the royal figure in a procession. It may be said of the resurrection as of other miracles that such things do not occur, to which the reply is obvious that if they did occur the Son would be robbed of His supreme distinction. It is to the honour of the Son that the dust of our cherished dead waits long for the call which shall bring them from their resting-places. He is separate in character and separate in the mystery of His eternal relation to the Father. "It was not possible that He should be holden of it."

5. The motive for the resurrection of Jesus Christ was of resistless force because of the relation He sustained to the undivided race of man. If the Holy One of God, the new Head of humanity had not been raised from the dead, the flesh could not be refined and uplifted into nobler spheres and an effectual bar would have been put to the perfected life of the hereafter. The Psalmist whose words were recited by Peter expressed not only his own personal hope but that of countless others likewise—of many even who did not belong to the Jewish fold. It was only through the resurrection of Jesus the Son of God that this common hope could be confirmed and accomplished. Why, it may be asked, could not men be content with the survival of some fine sublimated essence of the consciousness, when the flesh had been irrecoverably consumed? The question is rather, Why should they be content with an arbitrarily bisected life, difficult to conceive or imagine, when they have lived, moved, and breathed

in bodily forms, growing thus into strength, greatness, and benign social interaction? The prospect of a vague, tenuous immortality apart from the resurrection has no more power to attract human desire than the inorganic elements chemists think we may one day get from the atmosphere as substitutes for food-stuffs have power to quicken the appetite. *Menus* written in chemical symbols would be unpopular even at a state banquet. The mind can only think of itself through the analogies of the body. Is the flesh nothing but a Nessus-shirt put upon our spirits to eat away their innermost faculties and affections with pain, whilst its own fibres perish as the destruction advances? Is this wonderfully ordered planet the burning ghât where the race and all its works must be consumed? Do the fair blue skies bend in serene scorn over a world that is little better than a condemned cell, the scene of scalding tears and heart-breaking separations? Is it into a grim mortuary that we have been born, and are the white blooms around us the mocking bravery overspreading tombs that have swallowed up forever all that has been precious to us? Must that substance out of which the fair forms of our children have been fashioned, which has supplied the channels through which the love of friendship and family has coursed, which has been the wonderful medium of our thought and converse, the interpreter between the universe and the soul, pass like a vagrant mist-film, leaving no trace behind? If that is so those ancient Persians, who convinced themselves that an evil principle had fashioned the bodies of men and the grosser parts of the world, were wiser than Jesus. I would rather think that a humane parent had sent

his children to live in a yellow-fever swamp than that God had put men, made in His own likeness, and fit to rule the lower kingdoms of life, into a world dominated by death and inaccessible to the hope of a resurrection. Jesus was raised from the dead so that all coming by faith into mystic union with His glorified humanity might inwardly know His resurrection power now and at last realise its triumph in their mortal bodies. The apostles looked upon the power of the resurrection as descending even now into human life, reversing the sentence of death looming in the tumult and distress of nations, and making ready for the new heavens and the new earth. The restoration of all things had its beginning in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. His sovereignty over the new universe must needs be founded in His sovereignty over death. "It was not possible that He should be holden of it." As the branch shares the life of the tree into which it is grafted, so will those in Christ Jesus share His Easter triumph and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against them. No hope short of this would have nerved Peter and his comrades for the harassed and stormy careers which lay before them. The resurrection life of the race is bound up with that of its redeeming Head, and the destinies of those for whom Jesus was in soul-travail through the days of His passion called for this miracle, which was the beginning of hope, and could not call in vain.

Let us seek for Peter's inspiration so that we may believe with his abounding faith in the gospel of the resurrection. From this day forth let us send new and stedfast hopes to tarry like bands of angels about the graves of our sainted dead. It is hard to believe

that the graves shall yet be opened as surely as was the grave in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea. Pale mourners have been waiting for centuries but no sign appears. Stones are worn by the feet of the passer-by and often no one is known bearing the name once lettered there. Human dust for which no survivor or representative cares is removed by commercial contract to new resting-places so that the traffic of our highways may grow and crowds of mortals may tramp where the dead once slept. Perhaps we may count for as little a few generations hence, and the litter of our mortality may be swallowed up in the whirling vortex of city extension and improvement. But God forgets not. Let us try and see that all the impossibilities lie on the side of the negations. Religion is not a guessing competition, but a Divine covenant which cannot pass. Whatever views we may hold of the precise quality of the inspiration vouchsafed to psalmists and apostles, and whatever our theories of the method of the resurrection, God has spoken and His word warrants faith. He has established a covenant with us no less than with the Incarnate Son, and death will be as helpless to detain us in its privations. "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."

XVII

INWARD PENALTY

"But he that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul."—PROV. vii. 36.

THE voice of wisdom which here speaks to us is one with that of revealed religion, of Jesus the wisdom and word of God, of the soul's deepest and most sacred instincts and discernments.

Some men do not easily realise that God can be sinned against. If they are ever troubled by the review of past acts of selfishness and insubordination, they are troubled because of the recoil those acts have had upon themselves and others, rather than for any possible pain they may inflict upon God. Moral law they do not look upon as His simple, direct mandate. They assume that the Divine voice in the law has been echoed so many times through human lips, and weakened in the transmission, that it has lost all its authority and incisiveness. It has much the same validity as the phonograph at a public exhibition, whose songs and speeches have been reproduced to so many ears that they have no personal significance whatsoever to the last man who listens. Perhaps they have got into the way of regarding conscience as a slowly acquired social instinct only, and they attach no more importance

to its dictates than to any other consensus of human judgments which is focussed for the moment within the personal consciousness. Their thoughts of God also are so wrapped about with the breath of an impalpable dreaminess, that they scarcely regard Him as a living Person who is acutely sensitive to offence, and can be grieved by the transgressions of those who ought to love and obey Him. It is said some people are so constituted that they would have as much horror of robbing a private individual as would a bishop of the Church, but they have no scruple whatever about robbing companies, corporations, governments, anonymous syndicates. They look upon these collective and federated assemblies of individuals as impersonal abstractions without rights. And there are amongst us those who choose to take a similar view of God. They scarcely feel that He has personal rights at all, or if He has, because of the richness of His resource and the sweeping vastness of His dominion, He cannot be quite so much concerned about them as we are about ours. They half imagine a self-sufficient God cannot be seriously wronged. He will never miss their homage. They have much in common with the soft-hearted Socialist who would never defraud a man poorer than himself, but would carry off the jewels of a Rothschild, an Astor, or a Vanderbilt, if the chance came in his way, without a single qualm—perhaps, indeed, with a sense of virtue. God is too rich to suffer, and any loss we inflict upon Him by our disobedience is inappreciable. He is far above the reach of our little sins, and is no more pained and vexed by them than the angel in the Sun by the swarms of gnats in a terrestrial mangrove swamp.

Such an inference is specious and miserably unsound. If God is our Father He puts Himself at our mercy by the relationship, just as the earthly father is in some sense at the mercy of his babe when life dawns, and the fragile little creature makes for itself a nesting-place in his heart. The wrong a father may suffer at the hands of his own child is incomparably greater than the wrong he may suffer from those less closely akin. And if God's love to us is deeper even than the love of earthly parents, to just the extent of that difference, have we the power to affront and grieve Him. The act of a redeemed but rebellious child wounds God more deeply and ineffaceably than human parent can be wounded, for Divine love is fathomless and unchanging. He remembers it to all eternity. When you think of this it will scarcely seem an incredible thing that intractable sin should be punished by massive periods of pain, the thought of which staggers us. God has put Himself in our power, and, however little we realise it, He can be sinned against more guiltily and grievously by far than the most helpless being at our feet. Of course we find it hard to think and feel that it is really so.

I will try to present the subject from another side just now. It may possibly have weight with some who have not reached the stage of religious knowledge and quickening at which they are stricken with shame and sorrow at the thought that they have sinned against God. We often hear men speak of the duties they owe to themselves. This, that, or the other thing I cannot do because it is against my own natural and legitimate rights as a man. I owe a duty to myself, and, whatever may be urged in objection, am bound to take this particular course in vindicating my name

or asserting my interests. Religion is chief of the duties we owe to ourselves, and indeed the sum of all other duties. The soul was created with rights it never can consent to forego, however shamefully we may ignore them. The soul will be keen to vindicate its own rights, and that after a terrible fashion ; and if its rights are neglected, despised, contemned, it will cry out against us in strains we must hear with unconquerable dismay, strains deafness to which we would gladly purchase at the price of worlds. No revenge is so keen and immitigable as that of one's own soul. A man had better meet the fiercest incarnation of human vengeance he can imagine than be face to face for ages with the accusing powers of his own suffering personality.

In what respect does the man who sins against the dictates of religion wrong his own soul?

He defrauds its hidden capacities for spiritual life and greatness. By the word of wisdom the soul is nourished to the full measure of its majestic destiny. He who despises the precepts and sanctions of religion frustrates the highest possibilities of his being and makes void its Divinely appointed blessedness. Every child born into the world comes there with a natural right of access to all things needful for the development of the physical, social, and intellectual life, upfolded within its senses. It has an unwritten claim, strong as eternal law, to light, warmth, nurture, fellowship. We brand as inhuman the man or the woman who deprives it of these sacred, elemental influences which are indispensable to well-being. No word of reprobation is too strong to express our abhorrence of the unnatural mother who systematically deprives her babe of food, with the result that

after a year of life it weighs little more than at birth. The cripple cultivator who dwarfs and distorts either his own children or the stolen children of others, so that their deformities may minister to a depraved taste for amusement or win the pennies of a soft-hearted public, is one upon whom when we have spent every syllable of execration in the language justice has not been done. We are scarcely less severe upon the man who drinks or gambles away the food, the raiment, the shelter, the schooling of his children, and plays the destroying angel to their future prospects. His little ones might have grown up into the strongest, the wisest, the best-honoured people of the neighbourhood, but because of his debaucheries they prove a shoal of dwarfs, idiots, pauperised and perhaps criminal incapables, who will be a drag upon society and a curse to themselves for years to come. It is he who wronged them at the outset and put them into their dismal groove. And the sin is great in proportion to the capacity of the children. These victims of neglect may have given early signs of promise. How we should cry out if we could foresee that each child manufactured into a puny, scrofulous, degraded counterfeit of man by the predetermining act of the father was a Milton, a Newton, a Wilberforce, a Richard Cobden, or a Robert Browning. Great poets, generals, statesmen, inventors, artists, patriots, have been crushed into ignoble arrest and failure by the sinister conduct of some evil man who held the promise of their childhood in his demoniac clutch. By his own act and habit a youth sometimes darkens and desolates his own opening history. He is coarse, foolhardy, deaf to counsel, self-indulgent, and he incurs a physical degradation he is never able

to shake off. He ignores the conditions of health and makes himself a burden to others. With opportunities of high education, he spends the golden days of youth in drinking, idleness, and dissipation, and brings back from the university to which he was sent a large knowledge of evil and a repulsive taint which shows itself in his speech, his temper, and his future plans. He might have been a scholar, but comes home a sot whom even indulgent sisters loathe. He goes forth into the world to be despised, and is buried at last with a sense of relief. His funeral is the dawn of convalescence for his family. He sinned against his opportunities and skulked off to lurking-places where he vainly fancied no moral opinion could disturb him. Great things were in him, but he bred in his own breast the appalling blight that blackened his early promise. The wrong in that case is a wrong he has done to himself.

The man who sets at nought the calls of religion is his own enemy in a yet more grievous sense. Within heart and brain there lie indefinable capacities of mind and character which the ministry of religion alone can lead forth into light, maturity, freedom, fruitfulness. The disparity between the youth whose physical and intellectual nutrition has been altogether neglected and a Sir Isaac Newton or a Lord Kelvin can but imperfectly suggest the high capabilities in the human soul, effectually suppressed by habitual irreligion. There is something of God in the meanest of us, and when we despise the word of spiritual wisdom we sterilise a Divine seed concealed within the soul—a seed whose nutrition would have assimilated the whole character to the Divine likeness and uplifted the being into true union with God. In living without

religion you quench Divine fires and rob your soul of that which is inestimably precious. You have an innate capacity for attaining a saintship of honour in both earth and heaven, but by this neglect you limit life and character to what is base, paltry, brutish, grovelling. The rights of the soul reach and range to the highest exaltation of human life here and to the most splendid enthronements of heaven. By choosing a course that is in any sense wicked, foolish, or short-sighted you profane those rights. Oh, how we should cry out upon the housetops if others were to do a tithe of the mischief to those hanging upon their care which we inflict upon ourselves! The sight of a child shut up to an ignorant, diseased, and criminal life by the act of another provokes our vehement protest. In despising the dictates of spiritual wisdom we sin just as grievously against the claims and sanctities of our own being.

The man who fails to make wisdom the rule of his life *offends against the right and title of his own soul to enduring happiness.* It is inconceivable that a beneficent God should have made men in His likeness with any other goal in view than that of a blessedness akin to His own; and religion is the pathway by which that blessedness is reached. Irreligion is a mad spiritual Vandalism the desolating consequences of which are portentous in their dimensions. We never quite forgive those luxurious Romans who set out their banquets with dishes of nightingale's brains, nor London poulterers who are said to sell to the gourmands two hundred thousand larks a year. The summer nights and the spaces of the upper sunshine must forsooth be robbed of the ecstasies of quivering song to make toothsome morsels for

pampered appetites! But to wreck the gladness of childhood is unspeakably worse. The babe in charge of a native nurse who will not be troubled with its cries has sometimes been so dosed and disordered with opium that for years the riotous delight in living which should be the heritage of all innocence has been lost. Little maidens or bright-witted boys by the freak of some person left in charge of the house have been affrighted into idiocy. If such things were to occur in our family circles, we should find it easier to forgive robbery or arson. The gloom in the very blood of some races is a legacy of the persecution and terrorism to which their forefathers were exposed generations ago. History tells of ruthless despots who rode roughshod over nations and quenched the joy in every household. There is a wonderful power of recuperation in all young life, but when children are suckled in panic and nurtured in nightmare the racial temperament may change to sullenness and despondency. To crush out human happiness is as great a crime as to stain the hands in innocent blood. The tyrant drains the sweetest sap from all the fine channels of life. The assassin is not more foul and haggard of nature than the man who blots out the sunshine and silences the merriment of the home.

A man sometimes acts the oppressor towards himself and makes his life less happy than it was meant to be. He declines to participate in the satisfactions which invite him. The streets and the lanes ripple with laughter but he grinds weary and blind in the prison-house, not because the Philistines have put him there, but he is in love with misery and has chosen to make the worst rather than the best of the

present life. It is one of the indisputable facts of morbid psychology that some men have so warped themselves that, like owls, they find the perfection of life in midnight shadows rather than in noonday sunshine. An unhappy disposition carries them on to the end without a taste of the true sweetness with which the world is stored. In nine cases out of ten the probability is such people have wronged themselves. They are crazy, misguided fakeers, and not martyrs of either the Pagan or the Christian order.

And this unhappy type of temperament is reproduced and the wretchedness it breeds spread broadcast by moral folly or irreligion. The man who is deaf to the call of Divine wisdom closes the gates of happiness on his own soul. He incapacitates himself from sharing in the blessedness of those who do God's will and know the secret of inward peace. The time will come when he will have done as great a wrong to himself as that perpetrated by an Ivan the Terrible who terrorises his subjects beyond the power of laughter. A man pursuing evil ways walks with bare feet through a wilderness of thorns, and the feet never grow inured to the torment. There are many unpleasant things hidden beneath the devil's primrose carpets. Self-torture is against the law ordained by a benign Creator, and all moral folly is inseparably linked with self-torture. Sin is always found to be desolation when it begins to bear its fruits. Sensuous frivolity arrests countless songs of joy and turns a world quivering with the gladness of opening summer into a Gehenna of silence and burning. Even if saved at last you may find that some strain of gladness will be missing from your immortal life through every act of sin. All sin against God is sin

against the law of our personal blessedness. We are not yet in a position to begin to reckon the enormous wrong put upon our own souls by moral foolishness.

Again, a man wrongs himself by the neglect of religion because *he separates his soul from the gracious fellowship of an all-encircling God.* To distrust and decline a neighbour's goodwill implies blindness to one's own needs. He inflicts upon another incalculable loss who sows in his heart such suspicions that possible friends are treated as enemies and social converse is broken off. It would be a less enormous cruelty to destroy in a child the senses by which he comes into contact with the music and loveliness of Nature than to impair the faculties by which he is enabled to share in the family and social life to which he belongs. In a town of the Midlands a house is pointed out where, if local tradition is to be trusted, an English king of the Middle Ages shut up a child in solitary confinement to ascertain if the child would speak by instinct without being spoken to by its guardians. The story is probably mythical. Such an experiment if ever made would have been more cruel than vivisection itself. Robbed of the laughter and gay fellowship of playmates, cradled in fear and darkness, needing a home and put into a prison, with curiosity and aspiration stifled, the fate meted out to such a child in the sensitive stages of his life-history would have been appalling as that penalty of solitary confinement which has turned many a strong brain to madness. To make a nursery into a silent Pennsylvania prison of iron is a deed fit for devils.

The man who sets at nought the dictates of religion condemns himself to just as terrible a doom. He exiles himself from a God his spirit will one day

bitterly need, and robs himself of the rest, courage, inspiration which the sense of God always brings. It is only through religion we acquire the art of communion with the Father of the spirits of all flesh. Sin is as diabolical as the slave-markets depicted by the artist and described in harrowing terms by anti-slavery writers. It tears from each other those who should be bound together in happy community and abiding love. The tragedy of the slave-market is always repeating itself in Vanity Fair. The man who gives no heed to the voice of wisdom declines the highest and most satisfying relationships of which he is capable. He drifts into darkness, solitude, and homelessness. You can do no graver wrong to your own soul than to bring upon it this hideous and supreme privation, the loss of God and final unfitness for His fellowship.

To live without Divine wisdom incites the soul to a self-reproach which is stinging, implacable, boundless. The dull flesh even avenges in due time all the neglect that has been shown it. Through a comparatively trivial transgression of natural laws a man may bring upon himself year-long disablement, and be compelled to blame himself to the end. And the soul because of its nobler estate fences itself round with stricter severities. It is avenged seventy-and-sevenfold in comparison with the body which clothes it. One day the condemning voice will begin to cry out within the foolish doer of evil. It is much easier to bear the reproaches of others than to bear the reproach that comes from one's own spirit. A man can shut himself off from the execrations of the world or stop his ears, but he cannot flee from self-execration, for the voice keeps on speaking as he runs.

It is as feasible to rush away from an inward disease as to evade remorse. In some Oriental prisons culprits are punished by being kept always awake. Of course the punishment soon brings its own end, for rest to the aching, fevered brain is more needful even than food and drink to the body. Does not the man who spends his days in folly punish himself more cruelly? for he stirs up within his soul an unsleeping remorse. There is such a thing as the insomnia of a tortured conscience, and the ingenious barbarities of the Pagan East are perhaps to be preferred. It may be you sometimes challenge the equity of those forecasts of retribution to be found here and there in the Bible. The picture you say is overdrawn, and God is not so pitiless as the picture implies. Well, it is not our work to fix the ratio between sin and its punishment, but the little we know of the power of conscience does not incline us to believe in a doctrine of mild retributions. Perhaps in the supreme awakening your self-reproach will be as terrible as the God of the old theology. It is possible for a human soul never to forgive itself. Helped and healed by the pardoning mercy of God and the magnanimous tenderness of friends and kindred, we sometimes find it hard to forget the mean and shameful past. And the spirit lacking these helps may be unable to acquit itself. Conscience seems to inherit a strange sternness from the Holy One whose breath created it and has no mandate to pardon a clear, persistent, contumacious affront to light. The soul cannot cast off its original sacredness, and the faculty within us which pronounces judgment is enduring as God Himself.

If consciousness is indestructible, the wrong persistently done to one's own soul admits of no repair,

and blight brought upon the destiny may be final. Our life is so ordered that it is possible for us to inflict more stupendous pains and penalties upon ourselves than we can suffer at the hands of others. The wrongs brought upon us by others sooner or later find redress, but the wrongs we do ourselves find no redress in the changes and merciful adjustments of the outside world. In these days of heart-burning inequality and threatened upheaval, men cry out for protection, security, a defence of the home and the fatherland against all invaders. The defence which is most urgent is defence against ourselves, for we are thoughtless and possess terrible power over our own destiny. The most cruel disabilities brought upon a child will pass away with the passing of its poor, short life. The man who is handicapped by disease, defective education, an ill-conditioned childhood, hereditary taints of the blood, gets to the end of his disadvantages at last, in so far as they are misfortunes rather than personal offences. A man who lives in folly for the greater part of his life, if saved in the end as by fire, is handicapped by his own irretrievable bygones in the unknown ages. A wrong done to a fellow-mortal is like a rent in a garment, but a wrong done to one's own soul is like a crack in the deep foundations of a temple. We never quite recover the lost opportunity. In a tiny fir-tree, only three inches high, a naturalist counted twenty-six rings, indicating twenty-six years of life. Sin dwarfs the soul for ever. Its wound when healed by the skill of the Man of Nazareth may leave an ineffaceable scar upon the immortality. The forgiven sin may entail decades of disability here upon earth, but the unforgiven sin may follow the soul like a messenger of wrath through all

the worlds to which it may come when the flesh has crumbled. God gives to a man more stupendous power over his own fate than he gives to another man against him or even allows Himself in the exercise of His awful sovereignty. The wrong you do yourself by sin is immeasurable, greater even than the wrong you do to others.

Large numbers of men and women, inside and outside the Churches alike, have ceased to hold in any influential way the special inspiration of the Bible, and they look upon hell as an old-world superstition with which ignorant, well-meaning preachers once terrorised their congregations into repentance. But are not these men and women, who pride themselves upon their wholesome freedom from the mediæval nightmares, in danger of forgetting the unchanging substance behind the changing metaphor through which the doctrine of retribution was once taught? In the reflections suggested by the text no exorbitant demand is made upon your faith. The preacher is assuming three things only—God, Duty, and a Deathless Human Soul, a dogma common to all religions alike, Buddhism itself not excepted. Retributive law is bound up with the very nature of the soul. Man is so mysteriously and irrevocably endowed that he cannot help judging himself, and the habit always persists. Realms of terrible punishment may be predicated from the moral faculties of whose inward working we are conscious, as well as attested from the pages of the Bible. Every transgressing soul prepares within the domain of its own sensibilities a judgment-bar and an outer darkness in which terrible punishment is executed. Your own being will avenge its outraged and forgotten rights,

just as inevitably as God will avenge His. By a life of obstinate folly you are inflicting upon yourselves wrongs that you may perhaps never be able to forgive. Long before the earthly end is reached retrospective processes begin, and forgotten offences rise into constant view. In the mental changes that overtake and subdue him a man has timely warning of all this. However much he may try he cannot be so giddy and unreflective as he once was. He is compelled to think upon his past ways, whether he turn his feet into God's testimonies or not. The punishment a transgressor inflicts upon himself may be endless. Do not forget the immanence of retributive law. The devil will make you into a gloomy flagellationist unless you are fortified by God's direct absolution against him and the terrors of an accusing conscience. An unrepentant man is self-doomed by an indelible attribute of righteousness which will always cleave to him in virtue of his Divine origin.

A Buddhist story I once read has in it a weird gleam of spiritual wisdom. A man long notorious for his vicious, violent character was seized with alarming sickness. In his delirium a spirit came to his side, and taking him by the hand led him through the many courts of the underworld. He found himself in a vast hall divided up into alcoves, where judges sat and passed sentence upon transgressing members of the human race who were being dragged before them. At length he came in his dream to one alcove the presiding official of which was curtained off from view. A voice addressed him. Upon tablets placed ready for the purpose he was peremptorily ordered to write a complete confession of his past follies and offences. Sentence was then pronounced

by the mysterious figure veiled from view. The culprit was to be thrice struck by lightning. The curtain lifted and the man saw his own image and likeness seated behind it in the alcove. He had unconsciously judged himself. In that grotesque vision one side of a profound spiritual truth is presented to us. God judges you through your own moral sense as well as from a great white throne set in the midst of the nations in the great reckoning day; and an unconquerable impulse within the soul compels it to inexorable severity. The soul will at last be driven to avenge its own wrongs with a pitiless and unflinching justice.

But this leads us to the further truth. Every wrong against your own soul is a multiplied wrong against the God who created you for Himself and redeemed you by His Son. You cannot be your own enemy without being God's enemy likewise. His burning judgments will join themselves to your self-judgments in a last apocalypse of fiery wrath.

If these things be so shall we not turn from the ways of folly and death? Shall we not show ourselves lovers of life? Can there indeed be one in our midst who is in love with death and, like the despairing queen with the asps in her bosom, courts its stings? See to it that you are still found waiting about the gates of Wisdom's temple. "They that seek Me early shall find Me." The promise is not to the dilatory and the culpably belated. If you get wisdom you will have life and the lovingkindness which exalts and transcends life to all ages.

XVIII

PROBATION AND ITS APPOINTED TERM

"Ye shall die in your sins."—JOHN viii. 24.

IS the hope of salvation limited to the present life? That we are now in a state of probation is allowed by all who rest their views upon the authority of the Bible; but is the probation exclusive? or is the future life almost as rich in the promise and possibility of repentance as the present? May one who to the last hour of his earthly career has been knowingly and obstinately wicked begin to put himself right with God after death? The man who is not an absolute universalist, but who admits that after reiterated probations in the life to come an unsaved residuum may yet need to be dealt with by the mysterious judgment of the Almighty, sometimes holds and asserts the doctrine that repentance unto life is possible after a soul has left the flesh.

It is said that the message of "the larger hope" seems to meet not a few of the difficulties pressing upon those who find their instinctive humanity strained by the inevitable applications of that orthodox creed in which they have been trained. The new view disposes of many grave questions that

are an embarrassment to faith. To such pleas it is a sufficient reply that we often take upon ourselves cares which do not belong to us, and concern God only in His character of Judge. In not a few instances the difficulties are an artificial manufacture and can be met without the promulgation of a new evangel of guess.

A probation after death, it is argued, is often required for an equitable determination of the destiny of those who die young, and of those types of men in whom much that is good mixes itself with obvious frailties and imperfections. These judicial enigmas which baffle our understanding may be best met by assuming an extension of the privileges and opportunities accorded to men upon earth. But when we say the Bible encourages no expectation of restoration after death, we do not imply that the progress, improvement, and moral perfecting of mixed and immature types of character is impossible beyond the veil. All this may be justly hoped for if a choice has been made, the turning-point towards God reached, and a regenerative germ implanted, that can then unfold itself. But no such revolutionary change of character comes to pass when death has done its work as alters the balance between good and evil in the soul, such a change as we imply by the terms repentance and conversion. The earthly life tests and verifies in an adequate degree the promise and possibility which are in human character.

A registered box of mineral ore has been sent to the analytical chemist. Portions of it he breaks up and submits to various tests. Yes, it is rich in gold, and the mine from which it comes will repay the working. The processes of the chemist are pro-

bationary. He has been testing what there is in it, but he does not refine the gold or work it up into all the forms it will one day assume. That belongs to another economy of industry. Loads of similar ore are sent into the mill and the assay office, and then afterwards the bars and ingots find their way to the mint or the jeweller or the decorative artist. These latter processes are not probationary, but belong to a distinct order of craftsmanship. Refining and perfecting processes may be possible after the death which ends our probation and irrevocably declares the principles which are in us. In fact some of the processes take place in the act of death itself. Many imperfections arise from the limitations of the lot in which we are placed rather than in wilful and virulent fault of character. Thoughtlessness can no more be put down as sin in a child that his habit of dodging difficult consonants when he first lisps can be accounted a proof of unusual depravity. Some imperfections evaporate with the last breath on earth and do not need to be eliminated by the discipline of a second probation.

The great majority of the human race, it is said, are outside the domain of Christian teaching and activity. How pleasantly we could resolve the problem concerning the after-life of those who live and die in darkness if we might believe in an evangel for disembodied spirits and assume that the probation of the soul did not close with the grave. To such suggestions it is a sufficient reply that our Lord's words only justify us in threatening condemnation to those who wilfully resist and disbelieve the gospel. How God will deal with the heathen is not for us to know, but it is a glaring impiety in us

to invent and parade theories which are to help Him out of His judicial difficulties, especially when those theories tend to revolutionise the groundwork of our own responsibilities, and threaten the subversion of not a little of the teaching He sent His Son to proclaim.

In no heathen mind have I ever found such a dire lack of light as would justify me in saying, "Here there can be no responsibility, however faint, and the judgment that holds accountable a poor vacuous creature, akin to the ape, is a burlesque." If Jesus Christ had not been made known to us as the light of every man coming into the world, the history of the ethnic religions might have taught us to look for some unseen sun from which the Gentile conscience has been illuminated. Now and again a traveller startles us by the assertion that he has met tribes without any sense of God or the least shred of a rite which recognises the superhuman. But the question is one upon which no passing traveller can draw a trustworthy conclusion, and recent inquiries tend to show that races low down in the scale of intelligence, like some people even in Christian lands, make a secret of their religion. The great historic empires of the world have become possible only upon a basis of moral ideas with Divine sanctions for those ideas. Experience and observation force upon me the conviction that though the light ministered to different races may vary in degree, so that it is impossible for all to be judged by the same standard, yet there is everywhere light enough to admit of a judgment of some kind, and we must be content to leave such problems in the hands of the Merciful Judge.

A great evangelist of the eighteenth century, who often preached the wrath to come with a stern and soul-awakening realism, never complicated his message by those irrational side-issues from which the apostles of "the larger hope" claim they are just delivering the Christian Church and creed. Two extracts from the writings of John Wesley will make this clear. Quoting Robert Barclay, the Quaker, he says: "The benefit of the death of Christ is not only extended to such as have the distinct knowledge of His death and suffering, but even to those who are inevitably excluded from this knowledge. Even these may be partakers of the benefits of His death if they suffer His grace to take place in their hearts so as of wicked men to become holy." Upon these words Wesley makes the wise, catholic comment: "In these points there is no difference between Quakerism and Christianity."

In the form of discipline agreed upon between Wesley and his preachers we find these statements:—

"Who of us is now accepted of God?"

"He that now believes in Christ with a loving and obedient heart."

"But who amongst those that never heard the gospel?"

"He that according to the light he has feareth God and worketh righteousness."

"Is this the same with he that is sincere?"

"Nearly, if not quite."

Such theology is neither harsh nor antiquated and cuts away the ground from under the feet of the man who would revolutionise our views of "the last things" in the interests of the non-Christian races of the world.

But we are told that a probation after death would equalise the opportunities possessed by men of all races and of all centuries. It would act in the sphere of the unseen as a levelling ordinance, and fulfil some of our social ideals in the eternal kingdom. Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon, would thus be brought upon the same exact plane of privilege as Chorasin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum and develop those capacities of evangelical obedience in which the Gentile cities surpassed the cities of the Galilean lake-side. Perhaps it is not God's purpose to equalise privilege and opportunity by mechanical rules in every case and through all the stages of human development. It is the right of His sovereignty to give one, three, or five talents. So that every man is better treated in the end than he deserves, there can be no just cause of complaint. To equalise privilege and responsibility by an expedient of this sort would look like a clumsy attempt to patch up the imperfect arrangements of an earlier dispensation. Had it been God's will to equalise after a hard-and-fast rule He ought to have started every member of the human race upon his course at the same moment of time, on one huge monotonous planet, enveloped everywhere by precisely the same conditions. It is obvious that such a scheme would have deprived one generation of the experience of its predecessors and have involved needless pain and disappointing experiment. A world so constituted would perhaps have involved the maximum amount of folly and failure, not to speak of the maddening monotony which would have weighed upon its fortunes. Every man would have been the mirror of his neighbour and all stars of

precisely the same magnitude. For wise and benign reasons of His own God has perhaps willed to vary the destinies of His creatures, and He does that by varying their initial privileges and responsibilities. His judgments will necessarily adjust themselves to variations of opportunity and dissimilarities in the scale of character.

The New Testament teaching upon the subject of probation and the future life is marked by brevity and reserve. In our Lord's clear and terrible declaration to the Jews we have an utterance of culminating significance. These words are unmistakable and are spoken without parable or veiling metaphor.

1. Jesus teaches that for His Jewish contemporaries salvation was dependent upon the grace of a ministry strictly limited in the term of its activity, and that the possibility of faith in His work and person would soon pass away from them. That this is likewise true for all who stand in corresponding positions of privilege is an inevitable inference.

2. Jesus declares that His presence will soon withdraw itself from their midst and with that withdrawal the sin of His hearers will finally bind itself upon the soul. Whatever evangel there might be for those who were aforetime disobedient, as far as these Jews who had the opportunity of hearing Christ and testing His claims were concerned, there was to be no preaching to the spirits in prison.

3. Jesus foretells that there shall one day be a self-interested seeking to which He cannot respond—a seeking prompted by servile motives, the kind of seeking we are sometimes assured will be begotten by the discipline and tribulation of the æonian fires,

By no new incarnation, by no fresh message, by no unexpected disclosure of grace can He answer to such a seeking.

4. Jesus avows with reiteration that His ministrations of mercy are limited to the present life. Dying in sin will put the last barrier between Himself and these disobedient souls. Jesus will not discover Himself to those who then seek Him, so that if saved in the future life it must be a salvation they achieve for themselves, which is impossible. If a man cannot save himself from sin in its first stages here, far less is it likely that he will be able to release himself from the aggravated burden in the hereafter without a helping Mediator.

If the hope of a new call to repentance for those who were fast sinning away their opportunies was to be in any degree encouraged, now was the appropriate moment in Christ's teaching to whisper this dim possibility. But His words forbid anticipations. The supposition that the next life was to carry on the indulgent probation of this, removes all sting from this threat to the unbelieving Jews that they should die in their sins.

If the term of probation is to be indefinitely prolonged after death, to die in sin is not one whit more terrible than to live in it, and our Lord's threatening to the unbelieving Jews is ambiguous and unmeaning. Indeed some complaisant theorisers upon this solemn question so far forget the clear teachings of the Scriptures that they venture to argue many men may hereafter be placed under more promising conditions for working out the salvation of the soul than here. Will they not be released from that burden of fleshly appetite which has formed

so terrible a temptation to sin? Every hereditary physical taint that may have depraved and destroyed their lives will be left behind. All morbid passions will slough themselves off with the dissolution of the body. And then there will be a nearer and more convincing contact with the realities of the unseen world. The issues of religion will thus admit of no controversy. Perhaps the change wrought by death accords with such forecasts, and for that very reason less scope may be found for the play of a purely moral life there than here. A life which by its foundation facts excludes alternative interpretations is a life in which there can be little freedom for choice and for the character that evolves itself by selective acts of the will. If that world promises so much more for the regeneration of character than this, one wonders why it was not made the birthplace rather than the goal of the race. This method of setting forth the larger hope misunderstands the disease of the race. It implies man needs a new world rather than a new heart, better organic conditions rather than the great sacrifice of love and the strivings and subtle persuasions of the unseen Spirit of God. If that be true Jesus ought to have looked upon the life after death as bringing with it a new evangel rather than as marking the close of the old. The Master's parables are wrong, for this more recent gospel opens a new door of hope and leaves no one knocking outside. He ought to have spoken of the hereafter in the spirit of Isaiah's expectancy. Why did He not direct His hearers to turn away from the imperfect Saviour in the flesh to the more perfect Saviour in the realm of shades? It was an entire mistake to speak of the coming death of His obdurate

gainsaying hearers in terms of unqualified threatening, "Ye shall die in your sins."

The suggestion that new and more effectual ministries of saving grace may operate upon the impenitent after death *tends to dishonour and discredit the present work of Jesus Christ.* It implies that the light, persuasive love and renewing power now flowing forth from the great Friend of human souls offer an insufficient solution of the problem presented and must needs be supplemented by new revelations in the life to come. The Mediator can set on foot processes of a more successful purification for guilty souls in the spirit-world than the conditions of the present world allow. The earthly epochs of opportunity which have failed to induce repentance must be replaced by epochs with a new note of efficiency in them. That was not the feeling in the mind of Jesus Christ as He stood in the temple, where the shadow of the Cross always fell upon Him, feeling that He had given His best, and that after He had poured out His life-blood His ministry would be exhaustive. There were no reserves of reason, lovingkindness, spiritual power upon which He could fall back for the further help of those who rejected Him. The consciousness of having done the uttermost that was in His own heart and the heart of His Father confirmed His prophetic forecast of the finality of that judgment to which His hearers were so soon to pass. The crowning manifestation of redeeming compassion was in the flesh. The angels had desired to look into the secret in other realms, but they attained their desire only when God's Son was made flesh and died to purify human guilt. If the life beyond is to be in any sense the scene of a more potent redemption

from the dominion of sin, the supreme manifestation of saving love should have been vouchsafed there rather than here. The Cross was put up in the sphere where it could not win its most notable triumphs. Jesus suffered in the flesh because the life of mankind in the flesh was the realm within which the Cross was to draw into contrition, purity, and Christ-likeness. By dying in sin a man comes to taste for himself the death which Jesus tasted in his stead when He hung forlorn and desolate in the noon-day darkness. The presence and power of Jesus in this world ransomed by His sacrifice makes it into a kingdom where sin is no longer a necessary enslavement for any man, and he who does not rise into spiritual liberty here is not likely to do so hereafter.

The disciples and immediate successors of Jesus Christ were in no doubt about the interpretation of His teaching upon this important subject. The fact that the early Church expected the Second Advent at once left no room for what has become known to us as "the larger hope." The new theology inserts the processes which are to issue in the final restoration between the death of the individual and the general judgment, but such a conception was necessarily shut out from the mind of a primitive believer. An intermediate state for the discipline and reform of the impenitent could have no place in His scheme of thought, or at least must have been narrowed to a handbreadth. In early Church history a tendency very soon began to show itself which abridged rather than enlarged "the acceptable time" and "the day of salvation." It was assumed that there could be no forgiveness for post-baptismal sin, and if post-baptismal sin could not be remitted, much less the sin

carried by an impenitent soul out of this world into the realms of the unseen. Of course the fathers of the Church went astray in teaching such a terrible doctrine; but the error would have been quite impossible if Jesus and His Apostles had even held in reserve the doctrine of a second probation. The indirect language of the New Testament shows an underlying conviction of the finality of present privileges and opportunities. The lengthening out of the day of grace is always spoken of as setting forth in some special way the patience and forbearance of God, who is restrained from judgment only by His own strong pity. If the future life is to be probationary as well as this, the meting out of fresh opportunity and the postponement of a well-merited retribution cannot be fittingly described as longsuffering. A master bears with an undutiful and incompetent servant for years in one department of his factory or warehouse. Again and again he warns him, avowing at the same time that he keeps him on as an act of mercy. No sign of improvement appears, and at last he puts him in another department where he has just as good a chance of amendment and ultimate prosperity! If this was the alternative to speak of longsuffering is pretence, for longsuffering suggests that when the term has run itself out dismissal and ruin must follow. The Divine patience is described as exemplifying itself in the opportunities of the present life, but if the life after death offers chances to the impenitent it is difficult to see any special fitness in the term. The parable of the barren fig-tree would be absurd if the cutting down after days of patient and merciful trial implied new chances of nurture elsewhere.

It is often urged against the doctrine that limits salvation to the present life that *it rests too momentous a superstructure upon an inadequate basis of privilege and opportunity*. The answer to such an objection is obvious. Does it not leave out of account the secret, inscrutable ministries of grace interwoven with the commonest life? The sufficiency of opportunity cannot be estimated in terms of time but must be looked at from the standpoint of mind, moral endowment, capacity for character, guardianship. The child blessed with a wise training and the counsel and guidance of a gracious home who is sent to fulfil an important errand within half an hour, has quite as good a chance as a nobody's child from the street corner sent upon a similar errand with half a day for its performance. An undue margin of time may sometimes betray into neglect and mischief. It is not inconceivable that the period of probation might have been more rigidly limited without loss or injustice to human souls. The primitive tradition of God's dealings with the world's forefathers preserved in the Book of Genesis suggests that God did once make the term of human life much longer than at present and it was no moral gain, for men presumed upon long life and abandoned themselves to a frenzy of sensuality and worldliness. If twenty people were to travel by a certain train to-morrow morning in order to fulfil important engagements, and each had the same distance to walk and a full half-hour for the task, certain stragglers would be late as surely as though they had only a few minutes at their disposal. It would not make the slightest difference if the train did not start till noonday or evening, for the same half-dozen would be late at

last. Perhaps it might be a distinct advantage to some of the loiterers if they had not a single moment to spare. The man who misses the great opportunity of his life by five minutes is not the victim of a hairbreadth shortcoming only, as we may think at first. When we look into the case we find he has lost the great opportunity not by two or five or ten minutes, by a shortcoming measured in moments, but through the cumulative unpunctualities of ten, twenty, or thirty years. In common things we often find that the stricter the limit of time and the more insistent the need for alertness, activity, and concentration upon one paramount object, the smaller is the number of those who are unhappily belated. Cheerful obedience to duty, a habit of sober foresight, quick decision of character, to which all may attain, count for more in both temporal and spiritual spheres than mere years of time. The question which determines fate or fortune is one of morals rather than of minutes. The faculties God gives and invigorates by His secret ministries, the mysterious accelerations which His overwatching Spirit puts into the pulses of our spiritual life, the solemn sense of the infinite issues of righteouness conveyed to the conscience, strong, sacred and patient promptings are of the essence of a just probation, whilst centuries upon centuries of barren time could add nothing to it. The rigid limitation in our opportunities is intended to stimulate the faculties which form the true test of our responsibility and not to impoverish or circumscribe the promise of salvation.

That irreversible events of tremendous import arise from sets of apparently trivial and inadequate conditions is a fact forced upon us by everyday experience.

Nature is not in great favour just now, and it is, perhaps, a little dangerous to appeal to the analogy of her methods; but it is obvious she deals with men in their secular interests with a harsher inexorability than God deals with us in relation to the interminable life of the future. A child ignorant of the unswerving laws which press upon him on every side may do in a reckless half-hour that which will overshadow his lifetime. No man can wreck his far-reaching spiritual career by the inadvertence of a moment, for final penalties only come into operation after due instruction and warning. The destinies confirmed and proclaimed in the acts of the great judgment will be proportionate to providential opportunities of knowledge and self-improvement, and few candid, reflective men would venture to affirm that their privileges have been meagre. Most of us have a faint experience of inward voices akin to that of Socrates, and many voices of wisdom and tender authority address also the outward ear.

Within the limits of the present life there is *room for character so to unfold its promise of good and evil that a verdict may be passed upon it which will admit of no reversal.* And in laying down this proposition we are not seeking to solve the riddles of the judgment by invoking God's penetrating insight into the secrets of the heart or His mysterious foreknowledge of future conduct. The issues of the great day of account are to be determined by facts which have become manifest, and the convicting force of which all assembled in the presence of the Judge will recognise. The work of the secular world is done by a careful discrimination of selected material and typical workmanship. The public analyst does not need to

test the food and drink of an entire city to discover arsenic or hurtful adulterations. He can pronounce judgment upon a large stock by taking an insignificant fraction of it into his laboratory. The merchant who buys consignments of wheat or tea or wool reaches perfectly trustworthy conclusions, without examining every separate ounce of stuff that passes through his hands. A trained critic looks through a library and sees a work of twenty or thirty volumes on the shelves. By dipping into half a dozen pages he can satisfy himself whether the writer has knowledge of his facts and distinction of style. The editor who is watching for writers of promise does not need to read through every page of all the manuscripts which are offered for his acceptance. The perusal of a few thousand words or less, will determine his opinion, and he rarely misses a man with the stamp of genius upon his thought. In the first few hours of a pupil's work in the art school a great master will tell whether the aspirant will repay instruction and pass to a great career. Those who train the professional musicians of Europe know by a few staves if a candidate will be worth the pains necessary to perfect his gift. A few notes heard by a patron as he was passing along the road indicated a superb voice, and the patron provided the training and gave to the world one of its most famous singers. These are, perhaps, trival incidents, to us at least who are not personally concerned in them, but they serve to show how life and prosperity may sometimes turn upon the discrimination of a very few typical and representative facts. The basis for a judgment may seem narrow, but the chief question is the competence of the judge.

And do not the successive chapters in the history of man's conduct upon earth afford the material through which a wise and reasonable God can fix the final category into which a man must go when life closes? Must God needs turn over every page in the history of a spirit's development in the hereafter, before He can get sufficient evidence to justify a moral classification and the allotment of that spirit's weal or woe? To a shrewd human observer bent of habit soon shows itself, and in nine cases out of ten the opinion formed holds good for years. God judges character at death not so much by its crowned attainment as by its ruling inclinations. He never mistakes the back eddies of the moment for the current of the strong constant sympathies. If a probation after death would be necessary to furnish material that would justify shortsighted creatures like ourselves in pronouncing an eternal sentence, let us not impiously imagine that God is placed under the same limitation. He who can interpret aright all the struggle and aspiration which lie within man's threescore years and ten and give its proper place to every anomaly of temper and conduct which appears from time to time, can sum up character and fix the unchangeable lot of the man without error or injustice. Let us beware of attributing our own ignorance to God by assuming that because we should shrink from judging men at the close of the earthly probation through which they have passed, judgment is impossible to God. If we were to watch a man for ten thousand years and read him inside and out with the keenest sagacity, we should not have the material God has for judging the man when He has watched him from youth to manhood.

The history of our natural development seems to anticipate and emphasise the rigid limitation of spiritual opportunity. In both the species and the individual susceptibility to change is inexplicably periodic. New and useful adaptations are not to be acquired at any and every time. The intellect has its seasons of germination and fruitfulness which once lost can never be recalled. In childhood, for instance, mimetic faculties come into play that die down before the rise of pure reason. After passing to the meridian of life a man may learn to read a foreign language, but rarely if ever to speak it perfectly. His imitative powers have so far declined that he cannot converse with the faultless accent which is acquired only in the plastic stages of childhood and youth. A master-mind like that of Coleridge could not recover the quick ear and flexible enunciation of early life, and though he was one of the best German scholars of his time it is said that he could not speak a couple of German sentences intelligibly. And this rule applies also to the acquisition of new branches of science and the power to look at old facts from the standpoint of new systems. The capability has ebbed, and no skill or industry can restore it. The fact that a notorious miscreant, upon whom the *Times* newspaper some years ago leaned for the support of its policy, could not correct an ingrained habit of misspelling a particular word, led to the discovery of his forgeries. Thieves are far from versatile, and tend to become machines. Their operations run in the groove of long practice and habit. Some steal eggs, whilst others devote themselves to boots and shoes. The man who steals across the counter rarely picks a

pocket. Burglars are a strictly limited class, and seldom infringe upon other branches of the profession. Mental crystallisation is a common tendency in human life, and it is accelerated in the vicious and the criminal. The law works in two directions, making both for the edification of the good and the hopeless deterioration of the evil. We all feel after a time that our power of adaptation declines and in tastes, pursuits, general character it is increasingly hard to change. Mind and body soon lose their plasticity. The brain grows slack, the heart slow, and the power of fresh initiation leaves us.

And moral aptitudes follow more or less the same law of change. When the evil man settles down into his groove it is difficult for him to struggle out into a new pathway and the difficulty grows every day. God's power often helps men to do the impossible, but calling some grey-headed transgressors to repentance is like asking paralytics to climb the Matterhorn. After a time the power of ethical change and adjustment seems to pass irrevocably out of the life. The foundation-stones of a building may not determine its decoration, but they rule its broad outlines. Can a lifetime be passed without the formation of habits which all but preclude after-change? Do not impacts, velocities, momentums grow up out of a long past which tend to fix the soul's future pathways? Is not the fact that as grey hairs come the hope of youth gives place to retrospect due to an unconscious reckoning with these laws? We begin to recognise long before we have reached the goal that the character with all involved in it is fixed, and that there is little space for change. When a man ends his days with a face set in the wrong direction it is

not likely that he will wake up from his last sleep to find that he has been turned round in the darkness and given a new chance of righteousness. The subdued tone of declining life, the flagging vitality in which all the moral powers seem to share unless God be in us to renew day by day, the instinctive leaning to retrospect, the recoil from new enterprise are signs that character is assuming its last forms and entering upon its final phases. For good or for evil the temperament is inhospitable to change. The prophet Ezekiel reminds us in the name of the Lord that the latest acts of life are pregnant and epoch-making. Wherever there is a turning to righteousness former sin is blotted out, and wherever there is an ill-fated turning towards evil, the virtue of right conduct in the opening stages of the life passes into oblivion and the character is irredeemable. You ask, Is it equitable to make the quality of an infinite life depend upon temporal acts? The question mis-states the problem. The act of the next moment has its antecedent in the act of the passing moment and a long lineage of acts precedes this. The ethical course a man takes at any given juncture in his history is not entirely determined at that particular moment; and pains and penalties have reference to the new series of acts arising out of the permanent moral states issuing from earlier acts. The works of the probationary life are the first members of a series that tend to become unalterably uniform.

The fact that human probation is bounded by the present life rests upon a broad and reasonable principle, and must not be regarded as an arbitrary enactment. A curious story is told concerning the last hours of Sir Richard Burton, the famous

Arabic scholar and intrepid traveller. Throughout his life he professed more sympathy with Islam than Christianity, and of some virtues he could scarcely be regarded as a pattern. Curiously enough he was married to an ardent Roman Catholic, who made it her daily prayer that he might yet be won to the faith of the Church. Lady Isabel Burton affirmed that in his last moments the prayer was answered, and by his own request he was received into the communion of the Church. Another member of the family gives a strange account of this deathbed conversion. On one side of the dying man stood a Roman priest putting the consecrated wafer into his lips, and on the other a doctor with a galvanic battery trying to stimulate the senses of the dying, and possibly dead, man, into consciousness, for the last offices of a Church he had heretofore scorned. That painful and grotesque picture, whether true or false, illustrates a not uncommon idea that the dividing line at which a soul's probation stops is more or less arbitrary, and that if the technical conditions are complied with in time all will be well. But the solemn law of probation must not be interpreted after such fantastic methods and hair-breadth measurements. Whilst we do not doubt God's bestowal of grace upon those who repent in their last moments, the destiny of the soul can scarcely turn upon the precise moment at which the physiological clockwork stops. It is determined by numberless acts of choice reaching through the life, which consummate into finality before life ebbs away. In exceptional cases conversion may take place upon the border-line, but as a rule Jesus Christ and His grace and authority are specifically accepted

or specifically rejected before the earthly life has vanished. The solemn law is broad-based upon the facts of man's moral history, and must not be stultified into infinitesimal degrees of application.

We are told that the fires of Gehenna are benign and purifying forces. Of course they are; but to whom? They cleanse and sweeten the air breathed by the inhabitants of Jerusalem rather than recover the rotting carrion upon which they play. When bonfires are kindled in the plague-poisoned cities of the East, the flames safeguard the health of those who hurry through the streets and throng the bazaars, rather than benefit the poor victims who are convulsed in the hospitals or are being carried out for burial. We are told that the worm which consumes the corrupting flesh is kindly in its ministry. Of course it is, but kindly to the sound life that is still left in the world rather than to the festering substance on which it preys. We are told that the Scriptural word for punishment is derived from a word the root-meaning of which is to "prune," an operation that is entirely kind in its motive. Well, pruning is profitable and fraught with good, but profitable to the tree whose idle and diseased growths are lopped away rather than to the severed branch itself, which gains nothing by the process but a place in the fire.

A close and candid study of the backgrounds of Christ's parables affords no hope of far-off restoration for those who have wasted their privilege and opportunity. There is room to hope that God will judge men more generously than we sometimes judge them, and that His unerring discernments may discredit the clumsy methods by which we weigh and measure the actions and motives of our fellow-mortals. But there

is no ground for assuming that a new probation will be vouchsafed to discredit and stultify the ministry of the Son of Man upon earth. That would reflect upon the Son and disparage His dispensation. The apostles of the larger hope have turned the New Testament into a cryptogram where they have discovered a secret message of salvation after death the plain reader cannot find.

By teaching that the next life may be also probationary an assumption is set up which has no warrant in Scripture, and is perilous to multitudes, who are only too ready to grasp at indulgent theories which abate the urgency of salvation. It is easy to get on to an inclined plane and to risk our souls and the souls of others over harmless-looking gradients which generate fatal momentums. We begin by claiming an extended probation for the heathen. The next step is to claim it for the heathen at home, whose ignorance would soon be removed but for our carelessness and inconsistency. And the last stage is to claim more elastic conditions of probation for ourselves. And thus the whole tenor of Scripture warning and admonition is turned upside down. It is impossible to doubt that Jesus Christ and His disciples meant this to be the day of grace and the acceptable time, but we have altered everything without warrant or authority, and the present life is no longer regarded as in any special sense probationary. We changed in the last century, at our own discretion, the solemn emphasis put by the Bible upon our passing opportunities, with the result that the majority of men and women think that the relation of the soul to God may be righted at their convenience. Beneath these much-discussed changes

in our views of the last things there has doubtless been a wish to put God in a more attractive light and to justify His dealings with the deathless spirits of the race; but the effect has been to banish all fear from minds still needing at times to be moved by it. Our generation has become indifferent to God and eternal things, and Christ's idea of the overwhelming significance of the present dispensation has been thrust aside. Those teachers dare much who promise what God has nowhere specifically promised, and, considering the uncertainty of human knowledge upon this momentous subject, run the risks of misleading a frivolous and unthinking multitude with vain hopes. It is safe to keep to the specific time-limits of the New Testament in working out our salvation. The articulate gospel offer lies within the defined round of human life. "To-day if ye will hear His voice." "Now is the accepted time." "If thou hadst known, even thou at least in this thy day." Where the issue is stupendous it is infatuation and madness to run risks.

XIX

RELIGIOUS CONCENTRATION

"Unite my heart to fear Thy name."—PSALM lxxxvi. 11.

THE Psalmist has just been speaking of the unity of God, and in this brief prayer implies that the service of an undivided heart is the best tribute we can pay to that unity. The relation between this fundamental doctrine and the obligation it contains is indicated in the words repeated by every devout Jew before his morning and evening meal, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul and mind and strength."

To a writer of such broad sympathies the doctrine of the Divine unity suggests a prophetic picture of the gathering together of all nations for God's worship. From the north and the south, the east and the west, he sees many races flowing together with one consent and bowing reverently before the Lord God of Israel. And as he contemplates the glory of the coming days, he longs to realise an earnest of its peace in his own undivided consecration to God. He seems to feel that within his soul there is a world scarcely less tumultuous and unsubmissive to the

authority of God than the turbulent kingdoms of the Gentiles; and will, understanding, and affections must needs be leagued together in the tuneful service and daily worship of God. He felt, doubtless, as we so often feel, that it is only too easy to get into a way of offering to God a poor, broken service, which enlists but a part of the nature. In the human soul there is a schism deeper and more disastrous than the outward schisms which rend Churches into contending factions, divide an elect Israel into jealous halves, and split kingdoms into dissentient provinces striving with each other for mastery, and warring against the common good. Schism is inward, and many a man, allied with a Church to all appearance organically one, is a schismatic of the worst order, for his own personality is in a state of chronic inward strife and disorder. The Psalmist felt this in his own secret experience and recognised the need there was for some Divine power to take in hand the contending factors in his own religious life and blend them into a homogeneous and balanced whole. The heart, after all, is but a miniature of the great contending world outside, and needs within its own tumultuous domain the magic of a reconciling hand.

This vision of the coming oneness of the nations in the worship and service of the Most High seems to call forth his faith in those fine activities of teaching and grace which are surely able to enlist and conjoin all the powers of a willing heart and life. He who could tame restless and resisting heathen nations, bringing them at length to His feet in strange and loving subjection, could also prevail against seething tumult and distraction in the soul of His elect servant, and enable him to attain a religion coherent,

harmonious, concentrated, entirely at one with itself. There are secret dissidences in our souls, many as those which rack the distracted world, and the power which is from above is the only power which can weld the incongruous elements into a consistent whole and enable us to be permanently true to our highest aspirations.

The late Professor Tyndall describes a curious experience through which he passed whilst delivering a public lecture. By inadvertently touching a battery of Leyden jars charged with electricity, he gave himself a shock that for the moment destroyed all consciousness. After a second or two he remembered that he was standing before a public audience in the act of lecturing; but what he calls optical consciousness was much longer in returning than the mental consciousness of his own personality. He seemed to see bits of himself mysteriously hanging in the air. The limbs were apparently separated from the trunk, and it was only after an appreciable interval that he could realise his own bodily form in the complete unity of its parts.

We sometimes find a condition of things resembling that in our religious life and experience. Various powers belong to us between which no true bond of coherence makes itself felt. Our minds seem to have suffered dismemberment, and we watch ourselves discharging God's service with little bits of our being only. Even after we have honestly surrendered ourselves to God, complex and conflicting elements still assert themselves and wrestle together in our consciousness. The apostle who served the law of God with his innermost mind, and at the same time served another law with his flesh, knew what all this meant. We are

gripped by opposite eddies and find the currents of the higher and of the lower natures pulling us in different directions. There are the principles of an inward and a spiritual man operating within us, according to which we delight in the law of God, and there is an entirely different and antagonistic law in our members, and we are affrighted and cast down by the unending jar.

It is this vexing dualism, this ailment of an ill-knit, half-decentralised personality which involves us in inconsistencies painful to ourselves and sometimes occasions of reproach to the world. There can be no complete oneness of character till we adopt the Psalmist's prayer and persevere till it is answered. It is not enough for us to have principles; we must have principles which rule us, and it is by a Divine process only that our best principles become sovereign. Men sometimes shirk the responsibilities of the Christian profession because they have made consistency an idol and its opposite an affrighting nightmare. They fear lest the influences which effect conversion should not have controlling force enough to save from distraction and practical wavering. It is not often that religious life is entirely consistent from the first, and if such men make their conditions unalterable they may never become God's servants. We must run the risk of possible inconsistency, or at least trust God to save us from it. The man who does not enter upon the profession of religion is quite as inconsistent as the man who does, for better principles struggle within him than he avows, and his character is a compound. The one man is sometimes below the level of his standard, whilst the other man is sometimes above it. When the great step has been

taken we must be prepared to find intractable elements of the lower life not altogether at home with the new and nobler life which is growing up within the consciousness. Inconsistency is a symptom inseparable from the first stages of improvement, and the man who for the moment seems to illustrate this by his moral hesitations must not be forthwith graded with the hypocrites. It is doubtful whether Judas Iscariot was a rank pretender in all the stages of his discipleship. He had a distracted soul, and he grew into a terrible hypocrite because he neglected to seek inward unity of motive, affection, purpose. In the first dawn of religious life God does not always reign in the heart of His servants by the unanimous suffrages of all their powers. Conversion is an enlistment in the Divine service, but after the vow of allegiance has been taken the composite forces of the mind must be taught to act in unison. When a man yields himself to God a work begins which will at length knit the distracted personality into a consistent whole and bring all the parts of the nature to act together to the glory of God's name.

That power of religious concentration for which the Psalmist prays is *the just tribute to God's greatness.* When a fellow-mortal of commanding personality comes before us, or opens his lips to speak, we strain our eyes to watch and incline our ears to listen. We should regard it as levity and unpardonable insult if we were to give a fitful and divided attention to a man of genius. Half thoughts and passing glances may not always do justice to the rank and file of commonplace people. The worship and service of the Most High must absorb us, and will even then be tremendously inadequate. There is some attribute

in God and some quality in His ways with men corresponding to every power we find in ourselves, just as there is something in visible Nature answering to every sense with which we have been endowed. We cannot know much about the physical universe unless we diligently use all the senses we possess and supplement those senses by every art the wit of man can contrive. To fathom the order of the outward world and lay all its properties under contribution to our life would probably need a large addition to the repertory of our five senses. And we can never hope to know God, within the limits possible to men upon earth, unless all our powers are brought into concerted action; and that is a poor kind of religion into which little or no knowledge enters. The Divine service calls for a large, wide-embracing, consolidated league of our developed and undeveloped gifts. In the beginnings of His manifestation in human history God was served by a caste of priests and the priests were divided into courses for the work of the sanctuary. After accomplishing his round of duties the ministrant returned to his home at Hebron or Jericho, and others stepped into his place till he was summoned once more to sacred tasks from his secular spheres of employment. But this was a temporary expedient only. By and by the nation itself became the priesthood, because God's manifold claims could not be satisfied by the vicarous activity of the few. And it is thus in that community of powers to be found within us. The specific devotional instincts cannot be left to honour God by themselves, but must bring into an associated consecration every power of the life. If God must needs create many

orders of beings to contemplate Him from various standpoints and fulfil His sublime behests, it is obvious that His servants in this lower world cannot satisfy His requirements by the slack worship and fitful ministries of a distracted mind. His matchless manifold greatness claims the tribute of every faculty with which we have been gifted.

A religion *illimitable in the range of its interests* demands a service into which all the forces of the life gather themselves. Isolated acts of worship do not satisfy the spirit of its requirements. The homage Jehovah seeks is many-sided, including praise, faith, reverence, contemplation, obedience, philanthropy, and consuming love. It is not limited by the devotional instinct which is rooted within the human breast, restless till it can express itself, but is broad as life itself; and a religion is true in proportion to its comprehensiveness. We say that man is a worshipping being in virtue of some appetence acquired in the plastic stages of his development or mysteriously inbreathed, the sense of which is stable amidst all changes. And to some extent that may be true, but the need for God is the common thirst of all the faculties of the mind. A man's worship may grow out of a specialised sentiment or affection, but if it is to rise to a full measure of its possibilities it must gather in and assimilate the rest of the powers centred in the soul. It is to be feared that we are often inclined to make religion a seventh-day ritual into which more or less of devout sentiment enters, whilst one-half of the life is asleep. There is a conventional piety which is the product of a little bit of man's nature only and resembles a sacred recreation or pastime. Men are sometimes devout in

limited life-grooves and use their spiritual faculties just as a nobleman rides his favourite horse, leaving the rest to become dangerous or get out of condition through want of exercise. That is a poor business which cannot find full occupation for all its hands, and that is a decadent kingdom which has a large army of pensioners or unemployed. And the religion which does not keep all the power of the mind and heart in strenuous, well-federated activity is a crippled religion and unworthy of its origin in the mind of an Infinite God. The narrowness of the interests to which a religion invites us is a proof of its insufficiency. The service due to an Infinite God can find employment for everything within us and for minds a thousandfold more richly endowed than our own. It was a sense of the transcendent grandeur of religion and of the vastness of its interests which led the Psalmist to pray, "Unite my heart to fear Thy name." Many of the divisions of Church life arise from the tendency to make religion a cult for particular faculties of the mind rather than the common interest of all. One man's bias is towards frigid rationality, another's to ethical obedience, another's to emotionalism, another's to passive waiting, another's to resolute enterprise. A type of piety is sometimes favoured which resents reason and resolves itself into a devout or a sentimental prepossession. The attempt to think large thoughts of God and to grasp the motives of His government is resented as though it were an insidious form of impiety. Of course reason has its place, but within the sanctuary of God it is as much an intruder as the man without a wedding garment at the feast of the parable. The religion of these people is mainly a

cult of the affections, and whilst that is the root of godliness a symmetrical piety needs something besides a warm heart. Men with practical genius often put all the meaning of religion into the philanthropic schemes which occupy them. Others seem to suffer from a morbid enlargement of the conscience and make the service of God to consist chiefly in the scrupulous adjustment of many of the neglected aspects of right and wrong. True religion must include all these things, and must therefore include the harmonious exercise of the powers which deal with them. A solitary man could not found a civilisation nor can an isolated faculty of the mind adequately grasp in daily practice a religion which has for a note of Divine authority its many-sidedness. A community of forces has made its home within us, and not one of these forces can be spared from God's service. The Divine religion is intolerant of narrowness and distraction.

This united and mutually consistent action of all the powers of the soul is *necessary to religious perfecting*. Some parts of the nature are more predisposed to God and religious exercises and pursuits than others, but the goal is not reached whilst they act in isolation. We possess faculties from which the impression of God's presence scarcely seems to have faded, and they are the first to revive into life and devotion when the reconciling God once more draws near to us. And we find within ourselves other faculties which have a contrary twist and seem to do their utmost to make us rebels and atheists. The psychologist's doctrine of a sublatent personality is always with us, for not only have we divergent impulses which seem to defy the authority of the ruling will, but many wills meet and clash within us,

begetting much tragic confusion. Sometimes we are aghast as we watch the phenomenon in others. It is only too common to find a man with a passion for religion, but who, alas! has underlying passions which warp the conduct and separate his practical life from the controlling influence of his religion. His specious spirituality is exaggerated and his ethical feeling minimised to the vanishing point. There is an unequal pull of the inward perceptions and the different parts of the soul are out of focus with each other. Such symptoms indicate an insidious disease of the personality. In a perfected nature all the powers conjoin to extol God and fulfil His manifold counsels of love and righteousness. A piety in which the different parts of the mind are divided against each other is abortive, for it fails to consummate the integrity of the manhood and to complete God's idea. Religion is not a toll-booth or seat of customs at which God takes tribute of His creatures, but a spiritual training-school in which the quickened faculties are coadjusted for the high destinies which invite them. The salvation of the soul is bound up with the unity and co-operation of all its constituent attributes. We do not want to stand in the end of the days with gifts atrophied, thinned away, decimated, residuary torsos when a ruthless dismemberment has made havoc of the grand unity of life. The power of religious concentration ascribed to the Oriental is sometimes spoken of with wonder and commended to our imitation. But that concentration does not always mean the energy of an undivided mind. It is attained in some cases by a feat of subtraction rather than abstraction. The man posing as a Buddhist mystic often fixes his mind by

the use of opium, which puts the highest faculties to sleep and makes the brain an automaton. And where the attempt to attain concentration is not helped by drugs, the underlying theory of the discipline is that much which belongs to the original scheme of the mind must be depressed, deadened, extinguished. Such a unity of the soul is a mutilation. We can only be saved in the highest sense of the word if every power of the life is confederated into worship and holy activity. The creature with one sense only is a worm at the bottom of the sentient scale. Sight, hearing, taste, touch, scent, when brought into mutual league and co-operation, make a creature of sovereign dignity, and the dissolution of these powers puts the organism back into the mud again. And man cannot be perfected in his spiritual life till all parts of the soul are affiliated and conjoined in the sacred service of the Most High.

What is the difficulty which hinders this unification of all the forces of the nature in the Divine service? It is obvious that *the impediment is not deficiency of intellectual training*. Lack of religious concentration is more than a crude inaptitude of spiritual infancy. In a little child the powers of body and mind take much time before they cohere into a distinct specific personality. It is difficult for him to detain his attention for long upon one subject. His various senses and faculties take quick wing and scatter to many points of the compass. The aimless, erratic movements of the child's mind have been compared to the vagrant, purposeless zigzags of the butterfly. Broken bits of incalculable ancestral impulse assert themselves, which for the present scarcely seem to have found a guiding centre in the new personality.

The mental powers do not act together in close file at a word of command from the hidden life, and it will be some years before that comes to pass. And this fact has its counterpart in the processes through which the art of religious concentration is attained. If sin had not introduced a fixed discord into man's nature it might still have been needful for him to acquire unity of thought and life by a term in the school of experience. A popular writer, who has a genius for assimilating the technicalities of every craft, describes the first voyage of a newly built ship. He says that the structure of steel is a mere heap of pins and bolts, beams and plates, till it has been to sea and the different parts have learned to act together. Every piece in the gigantic mass has to find its work and learn how much its neighbour expects it to do of the common task. And in the same way the things which go to make the integrity of the human consciousness need to grow into coalescence through the early years of effort and exercise before a consistent personality is attained. If the tremendous fact of sin had not come in to disturb the balance of the powers it still might have been necessary for us to grow into the unity of a mature religious life by a slow blended process of development and self-discipline. But the problem is far graver than these analogies suggest, for we have not merely to learn the coadjustment of our powers necessary for a hearty and acceptable religious life, but to recover an adjustment lost by moral disaster.

It is a sign of degeneracy and acute disease when the faculties of the brain are at cross-purposes with each other and refuse to combine. The sick man has an imperfect mastery of his ideas, or indeed no

mastery at all. Curious and despotic whims invade his brain and jumble themselves into a grotesque chaos. It is a note of convalescence when the victim of organic derangement is able to fix his attention, to exclude repulsive ideas, and to entertain thoughts which are just, reasonable, and pleasing. And disease of the spiritual life gives rise to corresponding symptoms—unconquerable distraction, a riot of the thought and imagination, opposing impulses, a dissidence in the faculties caused by a malady God alone can heal through a gift of new life. When His pavilion is spread over us screening from the heat, and His soft winds soothe, and His hand is laid upon our ills, the discords cease, the powers of the soul are harmonised into happy co-operation and the heart is united for the Divine worship and service. That for which the Psalmist prays, looked at in its underlying meaning, is inward health, sanity, convalescence, recovery from the fever and tumult of sin—for these things are but other names for the tuneful accordance of all the parts of man's nature in religious life and devotion. Or to put the subject in another way, there are conflicting passions fermenting within the life which must be cast out before the religious unity of the soul can be attained. A god of this world makes his divisive presence felt within us, persistently competing with the Supreme for the sovereignty over our natures. He is content for the time being to dominate a fragment of the empire when he cannot acquire the whole. In the years following the disappearance of the Stuarts from the British throne the dishabilitated king and his successors sent their missives from Saint Germains in Paris to sympathisers in every circle of life in England, Scotland,

and Ireland. The hidden adherents to their cause were usually ready to respond and foment strife, disaffection, secret treason against the throne. For the best part of a century the different fragments of the nation refused to come together into one, and could not merge so long as these disturbing communications continued. And within the kingdom of the heart there are secret thoughts, divided desires, disloyal imaginations, a hereditary adherence to the world which a prince, once discrowned and discredited in the wilderness of the Temptation, is ever agitating by his disturbing appeals. Till the communication is broken off the kingdom is divided against itself and our religion cannot be otherwise than incoherent, distracted, chaotic. His disquieting missives come, in cipher or in obvious parable, to the reason, the tastes, sundry appetites and desires, and we are never at one with ourselves. Some parts of our nature always seem to be the special allies of evil and the arch-conspirator addresses them with much skill and untiring diligence. It is only by Divine power that this mystery of evil to which we are sensitive can be dislodged and its lines of communication destroyed. When this takes place the heart becomes a shrine of tranquil and undistracted worship and praise.

The grace for which the Psalmist prays is one and the same with the power which sanctifies. Holiness is practical religious concentration, achieved through the commanding motive of love to God. The imperfectly sanctified man is one whose heart is so drawn away from God and distracted with overweening attachment to the world that after a brief preoccupation with common things he finds himself disqualified for fellowship with God and whole-souled obedience

to God's word. When the heart is united to fear God's name all social and secular pursuits become indirect forms of worship, binding more closely to God and awakening delight at the thought of His presence. Our pleasures and diversions must be chosen or set aside from the standpoint of the Psalmist when he penned this prayer. Upon many a subject looked at by the Church in one way and by the world in another, the one question we need to ask is, Will the heart be thereby divided in its service of God? The question often asked, Is this, that, or the other thing condemned in the Bible, and must we look upon it as positively wrong? does not cover half the subjects upon which we need to make a decision. The spiritual life has its own laws of self-preservation, and a question applicable to a wider range of interest is, Will the surrender of a pursuit about which I may be in doubt contribute to my religious whole-heartedness? Will a particular pleasure if chosen obscure my consciousness of God and make me less prompt and cheerful to obey His call? Will it slake the kindling altar-fires and debar the spirit of zealous service from rising to compact and indissoluble unity?

The inevitable set of the human mind is towards concentration, and if we do not acquire the habit for good it will master us for evil. One man's nature specialises itself into the pursuit of pleasure, another's into the acquisition of power, and that of a third into money-getting, divorced even from the satisfaction of spending. It is said that a notorious usurer, who died a short time ago, had become so intense in his one quest that he had no other pleasure in life. He was without care for music, for art, for pomp and

display, or even for the pleasures of the table. His soul was wrapped up in the mere excitement of getting. And in one form or another this is the tendency of human character. Just as in the present day the big businesses swallow up all the little businesses, so sooner or later one power of the mind will absorb or control the rest. It behoves us to see that it is the best within us which becomes dominant and that this supreme concentration chooses for its processes the things which are pure, lovely, and sacred, rather than the things which are evil.

That experience of a united heart for which the Psalmist prayed can only be realised through a Divine force working within us. It is not a result of training or self-discipline but of re-creating grace. In one of his early sermons John Henry Newman sets up a test of religious perfection that to many minds must seem arbitrary and eccentric—praying through the Liturgy of the Anglican Church without a wandering thought. He intimates that it can only be achieved after a life of effort. But is not that to some extent an intellectual feat? It is conceivable that a student with unusual power of fixing his attention could achieve it without a grain of piety. And such a power if acquired for a time must necessarily decay with the physical strength. Intellectual coherence tends to disappear in old age. Many a saint burdened with infirmities of body and brain could never hope to win sight of heaven if that had to be the test. The Psalmist looked for a heart knit together in reverence and faith through a new revelation of Divine grace and power. That last revelation has come to us in Jesus Christ and it has been His distinction to create men of one idea. This

unity of mind and character is not to be picked up on the principle of small increments. His love so fuses the discordant parts of the nature into one that we are able at last to say with the apostle, " This one thing I do," and the consistent devotion of the whole career sustains the profession.

XX

THE PERIL OF DEGENERATION

"Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth; the faithful fail from among the children of men."—PSALM xii. 1.

THIS Psalm, which opens and closes with a lament over the decay of reverence and fidelity, is of uncertain date. Some have ascribed its composition to the time when David, as a page-in-waiting at the court of Saul, first had his eyes opened to the evil and corruption of the world; others have thought it best suits the period of his exile when he watched from afar the ruin to which Saul was fast leading the people, whilst his own heart was sore at the ingratitude and treachery of the frontier communities, whose rights he had championed; and others, again, have caught in its stanzas an echo of the dismal days when his own son was in revolt and the servants and counsellors of his prosperity joined hands with Absalom. But perhaps it is not necessary to date the Psalm in a decade of open reaction and discouragement. It is possible a devout and observant mind may have found amidst the peace and prosperity which preceded the luxury of Solomon's reign evil signs in the national temper.

The religious outlook even then may have been such as to call forth many fears and misgivings. The men nurtured to valour and godly fidelity in the school of hardship and tumult, the Hebrew Ironsides of the age, those who preferred truth and the fear of God to expediency, were passing away, and few appeared to fill their difficult places. A generation softer in habit, feebler in conviction, less rigid in principle, was rising into power, and the ascendancy of its traditions threatened temporary decadence and disaster. In this opening prayer the Psalmist recognises the dependence of the nation upon God for a succession of men fit to guide the sentiment of the times and to ennoble public life. The characters which are to bless the world and uplift the race must be made, inspired, and commissioned from on high. It is not in man to bestow the gift which produces the patriot, the prophet, the stedfast saint, the instrument of eternal counsels of good. Those who wait upon God need to maintain a vigilant and even critical temper in prosperous times, as well as in times when the best movements in Church and State slow down, and to cry out in supplication lest the men who carry on God's work should fail from the coming generations.

The Church of God has its vicissitudes, and the outlook is not bright and enheartening in the same degree at all times. There are days when the pulse of Spring seems to bound within it, and consentaneous hope and joy and song abound. And there are other days when the sky is drab, and the clammy winds might have had their cradle in the sepulchre, and hearts are weighed down by omens of weakness, frustration, and defeat. There are also inter-

mediate days when it is not easy to shape forecasts of the near future and its issues. In all these circumstances the temperaments of those who try to judge colour the decisions reached. There are imperturbably cheerful souls who think there is no fear for the world's to-morrow, and that it will begin, be continued, and end in crimson and gold; and they think thus not in virtue of their stronger faith in God, but because they have accustomed themselves to take the cheerier view and their luck has never failed them. They assume, without serious reflection, that a good-genius flits hither and thither in the air, and everything is sure to work itself out in the best possible way. And there are others who are predisposed by constitution and unhappy experience to believe there is an innate twist at the heart of things, and events do tend to go very much amiss indeed. Now, whilst avoiding a sanguine flightiness on the one hand and the morbid satisfaction of improvising jeremiads on the other, we do need to cultivate the sober outlook and to set ourselves in every possible way against the things which threaten to impoverish our future history.

In the histories of races and empires times come round when the deaths exceed the births. It is against such a critical phase in the history of a neighbouring nation that the greatest French novelist warns in a recent book. Whilst France for many years past has enjoyed unexampled prosperity, official statistics tend to show that the population is steadily declining. And not only so, the average stature has fallen off, the explanation of this latter symptom being that the men of picked physique, the flower of the race, who should have been the fathers of

stalwart sons, were cut off in the Franco-Prussian war. Is there any corresponding symptom in the life-history of the present-day Churches? Do the saints show a tendency to dwindle in numbers and to shrink in moral measurement? Are the characters which cluster around the Church planned upon less noble ideals than aforetime? Unless the forces that brace men into strength of spirit and inspire glorious achievements are always in operation there must be failure, moral dwindling, decline of religious vitality, and the falling away of the races committed to the ministries of the Christian religion. The work of building some cathedrals has stretched through a thousand years. Pushed forward in one century, allowed to rest in the next, resumed in a third, it has been completed only after a millennium of spasmodic effort. The building up of God's kingdom can never take place through intermittent methods. Its progress we may perhaps fitly compare to the building of a great breakwater. The security of the foundations laid depends upon vigilant and continuous work. If the beginnings are left for a decade every block of concrete will be washed into the sea, and the whole will need to be commenced afresh. The succession of workers must be unbroken.

We may form some idea of the number, quality, and voting power of the present-day saints by trying to estimate their influence upon the world. True servants of God are always magnetic, or they would be useless as compasses, the polarity of whose needles had been destroyed. Touched by the Cross of Him who draws all men unto Him, they will share in some degree His attracting power. Of course, a saint may be shunned or misunderstood, and his

power to act upon the problems of the hour circumscribed ; and yet it is true that God keeps the faithful in this world so that they may make themselves felt. The saints, however, for some strange reason, seem to have become a negligible quantity. The dominant politician treats the Church as an influential prime minister treated an honoured ecclesiastic when he went to ask for Temperance reform, bowing with profound respect and dismissing the proposal with silent contempt. The public-house is politically and economically stronger than it has been for the last half-century, betting and gambling were never so rife in certain sections of society as now, and larger numbers than ever are alienated from the Churches, without being dogmatically atheistic or formally anti-Christian. Nothing is so prolific in breeding unbelief as the sense of wrong, and thousands of men in our great cities blame the Church-going classes for the unwholesome conditions in which they live and for the paltry and precarious pay they often receive as the meed of their toil. Groups of Christian philanthropists here and there are seeking by brotherhood and the spirit of genuine sacrifice to heal this unhappy feeling and to bring the crowds nearer to the Son of Man, if they cannot get them into ecclesiastical buildings. But such conditions of irreligion ought never to have arisen, and never could have arisen if Christianity had been true to the spirit of its Founder. The problem grows. The vicious often have larger families than the virtuous, and the Israelites no longer multiply out of all proportion to the Egyptians. Unless saints appear in a higher ratio than in the past few decades Christendom itself may revert to the base conditions out of which it was raised.

Not only do we fail to touch important sections of society, but the power of assimilating them to our own life seems to decline. Congregations sometimes grow out of proportion to the Church membership. Young people are gathered into Bands of Hope and trained in the principles of a wholesome temperance, and whilst some are faithful to their early training, others prove faithless as soon as they are brought into promiscuous business associations. A large proportion of the children of our land pass through our Sunday Schools, and the workers in that sphere of service perhaps know more of the joy of harvest than their brethren in other branches of Christian work; and yet the result is not what it might be, for the children who drop away when they are well on in their teens and join the mighty hosts of the careless and indifferent must be counted by the hundred thousand and by the million. The leakage would be grotesque if such tragic issues were not at stake.

The conditions under which men live, especially in the cities, seem to repress religious vigour and individuality. The world is more masterful to-day than ever, and insists on a closer conformity to its own standards, which are, perhaps, not so coarse as once. It tolerates religious life, but that life must be of an easy-going and pleasurable order and its calls must be subordinated. The Christian man of the hour is expected to echo public opinion rather than to declare his own convictions. In shedding a morbid and repulsive asceticism religion is in danger of dropping its old earnestness. The self-indulgent traditions of the city macerate the fibres of soul as well as body and tend to produce a race

of religious degenerates. The kingdom of heaven is no longer taken by violence. The men and women of the hour expect to rise thitherwards in an upholstered lift, with a responsible attendant close by who keeps his hand upon the mystic mechanism. To immolate natural individuality is bad enough, but to immolate religious individuality is a hundred times worse, and that sometimes comes to pass through the tyranny of the crowd and the artificial atmosphere of city life. The best types of religious life need ample air-space and elbow-room.

The type of saint may tend to vary in the generations and the centuries which follow each other with unresting march. The experience of religion and the forms in which it is practised may differentiate with the progress of the world, like all other pursuits and activities, old traits being lost and new acquired. Sometimes we may be unable to see the saint because we have been looking for an eccentricity that marked his predecessor or listening for a tell-tale accent, and the eccentricity has vanished and the accent been smoothed away. Perhaps he is carrying a gift to a forgotten soul in a slum, and we are looking for him at a vacant *prie-dieu* or in a railway carriage with a marked Testament in his hand. But when all this has been allowed for, it is to be feared the saint is not so strongly outlined at the opening of the new century as in the early and mid periods of the old. He is the product of a more sentimental type of religious teaching and of a less strenuous scheme of religious culture. A great city, famous throughout the world for its municipal administration, has a water-supply with a deficiency of lime in it, and more warped and rickety limbs are to be seen in the children of that

city than in any other city of the Empire. And religious teaching is sometimes so sweet and soft and so scrupulously free from the faintest suspicion of doctrine that the wonder would be if the Christians produced under its influence were robust and straight-limbed. The men who go forth to be evangelists with an opportunist theology, and try to coax men by suavity or drive them by will-power into conversion, are not likely to create the decision of character and the unswerving fidelity characteristic of our forefathers.

No thoughtful man can watch without misgiving the secondary place now given in the Councils of the State to moral and religious principles. And this distressing apathy is not characteristic of one political party more than another. The deterioration in the sense of public truth unless arrested may reduce us to the same level as the least reputable governments of the East. The electorate absolves its representatives from the guilt of lying, at least if the falsehood is official, and has for its presumable motive the honour of the country. The trail of the company promoter is on administrative departments which have been without reproach for two generations. Both Houses of Parliament in the past have unhappily had notorious gamblers amongst their members, but perhaps not one of them would have ventured to go before a Royal Commission and imperturbably justify the morality of the practice. Politicans and aspiring statesmen may be found to champion clericalism and its arbitrary prejudices, but an attempt to apply the Decalogue, not to say the Sermon on the Mount, to international politics is met with disdain and the threat of a count out. The man who has picked up

a fad from Mount Sinai is not wanted at St. Stephen's. It is a debatable question whether a law for the emancipation of slaves could be passed to-day if an evening had to be found for its discussion, and we had to pay a ransom-price bearing the same proportion to our national wealth that the price paid by our forefathers bore to theirs. The men who did that kind of work have dwindled in numbers and their few heroic successors are dispirited. Philanthropists find a more fruitful soil for their labours in local bodies rather than in the Imperial Parliament, where moral enthusiasm withers as before a sirocco. If we could still afford emancipation grants for black men it is preposterous to suppose that we can fine ourselves for the emancipation of the yellow man whose opium-bondage lies in part at our door. Reputable Churchmen and time-serving Nonconformists alike are content that a crime against Chinese life and morals, huge, indefensible, and without a parallel in the history of the nations, should be perpetuated so that the Indian Government may be possessed of an item of annual revenue equal to that spent every ten days upon the South African war. Men in the vanguard of the new Imperialism make no scruple at hiding from criticism this dishonour of the old Imperialism by a mass of glozing inaccuracies. Every true patriot rejoices in the legitimate extension of his country's power, but there can be no true and enduring power which does not rest upon morality and international righteousness; and concerning this all-essential question the makers of our new policy speak with prudent reserve. It is said we have brought millions of natives under our flag and are governing them for their own good at

the cost of keeping them always on the famine line. Whether that be true or not the statement demands a fuller answer than it has yet received. We need passionate prophets in our national councils who will make and keep our empire pure and guard every square yard of it against the commercial adventurer who sows terrible tares. Have the Christian Governments of Europe tried to realise the moral and diplomatic significance of the fact that one of the results of the occupation of Peking by the Allied Armies was to fill a street with loose women from Europe, owned, it is said, by a Polish syndicate, and to introduce into some of the Foreign Concessions of the Far East scenes of flaring, uproarious international lust and drunkenness? The dearth of moralists and reformers in the Cabinets and Assemblies of Europe is heart-breaking. Oh, for a new generation of men fearing God and hating iniquity to take the place of those who have passed away!

The wasting work of death often beclouds the religious outlook and fills with forebodings hearts which tremble for the future of their country and their race. The leaders of beneficent movements fall before those movements have neared the coveted goal. Men and women whose lives are of most service to the community disappear at a rate of mortality which sometimes seems to exceed that of the wastrels. A rumour was current amongst the first believers that John could not die before his Master's return, but a day came at last and the revered confidant of Jesus was seen no more. We sometimes look upon able and strenuous workers in the Church and Commonwealth and imagine they are part of the permanent order, but we open the

morning paper at last to find the illusion gone. When the head of a court unexampled in history for its high standard of purity is taken away the fear of reversion to the coarseness and laxity of the past cannot be altogether crushed down, and men need to look to God so that the honourable continuity be unbroken. Unless He help the opening years of the new century may be the golden age of the "bookies" and the licensed victuallers. Whilst death often seems to do his work blindfold, at other times he seems to take special pains to swoop down the extremes of society—men on the one hand whose lives have been a manifest curse, and men on the other hand whose lives have been rich in blessing to their contemporaries. Those best fitted to abide with us seem to be most urgently required for the unknown ministries beyond the veil.

But the gaps caused by death should not fill us with the same anxious searchings of heart as the gaps caused by degeneracy, unfaithfulness and abating zeal. If we only discern His purposes and accept His providential choice we shall find that for every godly man and woman God calls away from our midst He has made ready a successor and substitute who has been under His special training. On some estates for every tree cut down a sapling must needs be planted. And God deals with the inheritance of His Son in this world of ours upon the same rule, and no impoverishment can overtake it.

The giant trees in the Sierras, it is said, do not increase in numbers because the cones which fall in autumn get no chance. They lie upon the accumulated pine-needles and dry litter of centuries and

cannot touch the rich underlying soil. But when a tree is uprooted by earthquake and the soil is brought into contact with the pine cones, or when a forest-fire, kindled by the lightning, burns up the dry surface rubbish, the seeds in the cones germinate fast enough and the succession of giant cedars does not fail. Something like that occurs again and again in human history. The seeds of spiritual strength and greatness are produced faster than the soil is made ready to receive them. Let dead traditions be swept away and the virgin soil get its chance of cherishing the seed, and the same qualities of character which have been the glory of the past and the same ministrations of effectual power will appear from generation to generation. Decadence may be a passing symptom in the life of a Church or a nation. The kingdom of God may even be taken from one people and given to another bringing forth the fruits thereof, but decadence can never be the final bourn of the human race, because God lives for ever, and His breath, which is the inspiration of truth, reverence, justice, and moral heroism, cannot cease to energise with new power and vitality those made in His own image and for deathless fellowship with Himself.

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